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BEN, THE TRAPPER;

OR,

THE MOUNTAIN DEMON.

A TALE OF THE BLACK HILLS.

BY MAJOR LEWIS W. CARSON.

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BEN, THE TRAPPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAPPER'S CAMP.

IN a deep defile among the Black Hills, far out on the western plains, three men had made a camp. They were of that wonderful race who have done more to develop the resources of the western world than any other, the trappers of the North-west. Their great aid in this cause has never been allowed by us as a people. We hear of great discoveries of gold, or of a new pass through the mountains, and in the discovery lose sight of the *agent*, who, in nine cases out of ten, is one of the class of whom this book is written. Their wandering, perilous life is full of hardships, of which we have no conception. The cold of winter, the savage foe, the yet more savage employees of the Hudson Bay Company, the grizzly bear, the snow-slide, all these are their enemies. They toil hard to pluck from the hand of stern old winter a precarious livelihood, happy in the possession of a few traps, a rifle, ammunition, and a blanket. With these they lead as happy lives as any, and as useful as most. Hundreds of tales of individual daring have been told of these men, and yet the truth is not half known. Their creed is simple as that of the border chiefs of Scotland:

“That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who *can*!”

To hate an Indian, or an employee of the Hudson Bay Company. It was in the days when the rivalry between the American Fur Company and the Hudson Bay was at its height, and the rancor between them equaled that of Whig and Tory during the Revolution. Each claimed the country, and many a bleaching skeleton on the western streams remains

to this day, attesting the fact that the men fought for the right of possession to the last.

The men in the pass were types of different nationalities. One, a tall, supple, wiry old fellow, dressed in a greasy buckskin hunting-shirt and leggings, with moccasins of moosehide, showed himself to be a lifelong rover of the hills and plains. He was piling brush on the fire, and smoking placidly, puffing the smoke from his nose in clouds. His face was a study, covered though it was by a beard of nearly seven months' growth. It showed the character of the man. Brave to a fault, an unrelenting foe, a steadfast friend—one on whom great reliance could be placed in time of need. His rifle, carefully covered with a buckskin sheath, was propped against a rock near at hand. A huge knife hung in his belt, by the side of a shot-pouch and powder-flask.

The man on his right hand was a Frenchman—a keen-eyed, vivacious fellow, dressed very much like his companion, and armed, in addition to the knife and rifle, with a pair of handsome pistols. His name was Jules Damand, and he had been a voyageur, trained to the business at Saint Ann's, on the St. Lawrence.

The third was a Dutchman! A simple glance at his broad, stolid face told his nationality. He was a stout fellow, of tremendous girth, with a smiling blue eye, an expressionless face while in repose, and a foot that looked much like a young trunk. He was smoking placidly, and suffering his companions to attend to the fire, and cook the food hanging over it. The last duty was the Frenchman's, who, like nearly all the men of his nation, had a theory in regard to cookery which he was always ready to explain by example.

"Look here, Jan," said the first-named trapper, "why don't ye lend a hand at takin' care of the fire?"

"So help me, as I never know I vas wanted to help you mit de fire," said Jan. "I vas sit here, mit mine shmoke-pipe, unt I vas dinking auver the times ven I vas in Yarmany. Yaw; dat is vat I dinks."

"I s'pose it's considerable of a kentry," said the old trapper.

"Consider'ble mit a coonthry! Mein Cott! Dere is no such coonthry mit all the earth. Vat! Ish dere any vere

you kin find such vine ash ve have dere? Now I dells you. Ven you coes to St. Louis, you vas co to Yawcob Post's saloon av you wants goot Rhine vine. Dere ish goot many blaces mit St. Louis vere dey says dey keeps goot Rhine vine. Put I dells you dat ish no more ash von lie! Dere ish no more ash your blaces in dat town vere you can get goot vine, unt mein frent Yawcob's ish von, I dells you drue."

"It's mighty poor stuff to drink," said the trapper. "Fer me now, when I drink, I take a little good rye whisky. *That's* good enough fer me."

"Boor shtuff! Penn Miffin, av it vash not dat I know you too vell, I would hit you mit your nose av you says dat vonce more. I dells you dere ish nothings so goot ash Rhine vine."

"Yes, for a *Dutchman*," said Ben.

"But you ish voolin'. Dere, I seen you laff. Don't say dat no more," said Jan.

"What does ye think about it, Jule?" said Ben, looking at the Frenchman.

"That it is very bad drink," said the Frenchman. "Peste! The first time I drank it, it was so sour I thought it would make me turn myself inside out to get rid of it. The Rhine grape is very bad. In la belle France they make wine that is good."

"Vy den you ask him?" blustered Jan. "Vat ish he more ash a Vrenchman? Unt I ask you now, aff you vas dell me, vat ish de goot over a man vat eats vrogs? So help me gracious, dey is no more goot to eat dan snakes. Unt dey ish p'ison."

"I reckon yer wrong, Jan," said the trapper. "They do say thet snakes ain't very bad eatin' when a chap is hard druv'. I don't say I want to try 'em, but ef I c'u'd 'a' got snakes the time I cum nigh to starvin' up yer in the Black Hills, durn my hide ef I wouldn't hev eat snakes or any thing else. I kem of a queer race. I ken eat any thing, and lick my weight in wildcats. I'm death on grizzlys. I ken wipe out an Injun as fur as I ken see him, and I calculate thet's a good ways."

"You talks a goot deal mit yer mout," said Jan. "Put aff a man says to me dat snakes unt frogs is goot to eat, den

I dinks he ish no more ash von vool. Aff ever I get vere I can no more get nottings to eat, so help me gracious ash I vill *not* eat snakes unt vrogs, aff day vash to come to me in hundreds unt t'ousands, ready cooked, unt beg me on dere knees to eat dem."

"Did you ever see a snake on his knees, Jan?" said Ben.

"Yaw! Ven you poke dem mit a stick, dey gits up on dere tails. Dat's de vay dey vould do ven dey vash ask me to eat dem. Unt I vash say, No, py tam!"

The Frenchman said nothing, but stooped to stir some soup in an iron pan placed on the coals, glancing up at the Dutchman with a queer smile as he did so. The blood of the Teuton was up, and he dropped off into low mutterings, like distant thunder, until a fresh grievance caused him to break out again. He found this grievance in Ben Miffins' manner of smoking.

"Dere," he said, "shpose you look at dat, eh? Ven a man ash ought to know petter, unt ve know ash he *know* petter, shmokes hish pipe drue hish nose, like dat, he ish von tam vool. See him. Puff! puff! puff! like a shteamboat mit a vire in her pelly. Now I dells you dat ish not the vay to shmoke."

"It's *my* way," said Ben. "Look yer, Dutchy, ef ye don't like my way of smokin', does ye know what ye ken do? Ye ken take the back track to the forts."

"Vy don't you shmoke like a Christian den?" grunted Jan.

"'Cause I don't want to. Never told ye how I learned to smoke this yer way, did I? No? I'll tell ye then. When I was quite a young man I was taken by the Crows. Durn 'em ef they didn't keep me among 'em more then three years. Made me a chief, and what not. Wal, they all smoke this yer way, and I took it up. Don't rile me up, Dutchy. I'm the Big Buffalo of the Crow nation. Rile me, and I light on ye pooty heavy. Smooth me down and I'm *ile*; but slick me the wrong way and I'm a p'ison critter. Look out fer me when I flop my wings and crow."

"Look at the hills," said Jan, prudently changing the course of the conversation. "Vat you dinks ven I dells you I've seen hills all made up mit ice, unt dey so pig ash dese hills, eh?"

"I should think your story was like the hills," said Jules.

"How vash dat?"

"*Made up* mit a lie," said the Frenchman, laughing and turning again to his soup.

"Den you ish von tam vool," said Jan, in a rage. "It ish no more as vive years since I cooms from Yarmany mit a bucket. I vas very pad ven I cooms away. I vish I vash stay at home. Put it vash near spring ven I cooms away, unt the vind drive us up north. Unt den cooms von of dese hills made up mit ice."

"It's true," said Ben. "I've seen 'em myself off the mouth of the Columby. They call 'em icebergs."

"Dat's it. Dat's the name!" said Jan. "Vell, I stands on the deck mit the packet, unt I sees it coom. I goes to the captain unt I dells him America has proke loose, unt vash cooming down on the sheep, unt would sink her. He laugh at me, unt said it vash an iceberg. Unt I vatched it very close, unt py unt py it tipped oop, unt turned auver, unt I dinks we ish gone. But it not strike the sheep."

"Lucky fer you," said Ben.

"Vat vash you dink auver an iceberg ash vash so pig ash it vash tip auver on the sheep, unt sink the sheep. Now I ask you not for to pelieve all dis unless you vash a mind to. You must do ash you blease. Put dis is vat I sees myself Vat is your opinion mit dese tam icebergs?"

"Oh, they say that they break away from the hills up north and float down yer. That's all I know."

"Yaw. Put vat makes dem tip auver? Dat ish vat I wants to know."

"How kin I tell?"

"Vell, I dells you my opinion mit dese tam ole icebergs. Dey ish very pig. Put, vat vas you dink mit a *vale* (whale) ash vas so pig as he vash go unther an iceberg, unt lift the iceberg oop on his pack, unt tip her auver on the sheep, unt sink the sheep. Dat ish my opinion mit dese tipping icebergs."

"Ye don't mean to tell me that you think a whale goes under an iceberg and tips it over?"

"Yaw. De vale goes unther the iceberg, unt lifts it oop on

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"Oh, they say that they break away from the hills up north and float down yer. That's all I know."

"Yaw. Put vat makes dem tip auver? Dat ish vat I wants to know."

"How kin I tell?"

"Vell, I dolls you my opinion mit dese tam ole icebergs. Day ish very pig. Put, vat vas you dink mit a tale (whale) ash vas so pig as he vash go unther an iceberg, unt lift the iceberg oop on his back, unt tip her auver on the sheep, unt sink the sheep. Dat ish my opinion mit dese tipping icebergs."

"Ye don't mean to tell me that you think a whale goes under an iceberg and tips it over?"

"Yaw. De vale goes unther the iceberg, unt lifts it oop on

his pack, and tips it auver on de sleep. Dat ish vat I dinks."

"He couldn't do it," said Ben. "Darn it. I've seen ice-bergs, and I've seen whales, but I never seen a whale big enough to do thet, nor you either."

"I shpose you dinks dish ish von lie. All right. You may dink vat you blease, put dis is vat I sees myself. I ton't care nottings now vat you dinks, only ven a man vill not believe goot sense ven he hears him, he is von very much fool. Vat you got in the pan, Shule?"

"Soup," said Jule.

"Vat you makes him off?"

"Grouse," said Jules, smiling.

"Ven he ish reaty, let us have somet'ings to eat. I ish hoongry. Vy does ve coom here pefore it ish dime to set our traps, Penn?"

"I'll tell ye. Ef we ain't on hand 'arly, all the places will be taken up. And I know a place whar we kin make our fortun's, sure. I've got a beaver-dam that beats the world. But come, Jule, I'm like Dutchy. I want something to eat. Ef it's ready, dish it up."

Each man had a tin cup among his other property, and Jules filled three of them from the pan on the fire. For a few moments nothing was heard but the clicking of spoons and smacking of lips over the savory mess, for Jules was a good cook. Jan shoveled down the contents of his cup first, and held it out for more.

"Like it?" said Jules.

"Goot!" said Jan, smacking his lips again. "Pest I ever eats. Gif me more of it."

Jules filled the cup again, and then replenished his own and that of Ben Mifflin, who was not far behind the others in disposing of the food. At last Jan was satisfied, and drawing his hand across his mouth slowly, he proceeded to fill his pipe for a smoke.

Jules cleared away the pan, put another stick of wood on the fire, and got away from the reach of the pan-broas hand of the Dutchman, and then said:

"I s'pose you know what you have been eating, Jan?" There was very little, except in the accent of the young man, to

show that he was a Frenchman, and the occasional use of the pronoun "him" in the place of "it."

"Didn't you say it vash grouse?" said Jan. "'Twas goot, anyvay."

"Yer mighty right," said Ben. "'Twas the best grub I've had fer a long time. But 'twa'n't no grouse. I knew it as soon as I put it in my mouth. Ye gev me some once before, ye remember."

"It's a pity Jan don't like it. I think it's durned good."

"Vat I peen eating?" cried Jan, in great alarm. "Off you vash not dell me now, dis very dime, vat it vas, I vill raise my hand cop unt let it fall on your ceplf (cope), unt it vill kill you!"

"It was something you said to-day you would not eat if you were starving."

"Snakes!" screamed Jan, starting to his feet, with both hands pressed on his stomach.

"No, not so bad as *that*," said Jules. "It was frog soup."

Jan sat down again to consider over the matter. For full five minutes he neither moved nor spoke, but sat with his head resting on his hand. At last he looked up.

"Pring me dat pan," he said.

Ben reached over to where the pan stood and handed it to him. He took up his spoon and devoured all that was left, not deigning a word to the repeated demands of Jules that he should leave a little for him. His jaws never ceased their action until he had deposited the whole in his cavernous stomach.

"Dere," he said. "I veels petter Unt so dat ish vrog, eh?"

"I should think so," said Jules. "You old cormorant!"

"Vat ish dat?"

"A bird that eats every thing he can get his claws on," said Jules. "Why didn't you leave some?"

"I vas brought cop to love mine neighbor ash myself. I dinks it ish not right to eat vregs. Put I dink so much more off my neighbor dat I vill not leaf vrog soup for a deraptation."

"Sacrifice yourself for the public good, you old hog?" said Jules.

"Yaw. Dat ish drue. I sees dat if I does not eat him you would do it, unt I dink so mooch off mine frent dat I would not leaf it. Dat ish all apout it."

"Do you mean to eat any more if I make him?" demanded Jules.

"Yaw. Venever you makes vrog soup I vill not leaf any of him vor you. Dat ish vat I dinks apout it."

"Perhaps you'll get a good chance," said the Frenchman. "And perhaps you won't. But you've finished it. Perhaps you will go out with me and catch some more of them."

"Nein!" said Jan.

"Why not? You eat them fast enough."

"Yaw. I always eat dem fast enough. I know vat ish goot for mine frent, unt I dinks vrog soup very pad vor him."

"That's enough," said Ben. "You've taught Jan to eat frogs, and he has taught you that if a Dutchman is slow, he is sure, and that you can't fool him wuth a cent. Scatter the brands and pick up your dunnage. It's time to be on the way."

"How far is it?" said Jules.

"A matter of five miles or so," said the trapper. "But we'll get our pay for the long journey we've made ef we ar' a little footsore at the end. Come on!"

They shouldered their pieces and strode off into the hills, the Dutchman sauntering in the rear, leading his horse by the bridle.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRIZZLY BEAR.

BEN MIFFIN strode on in advance of both the others, leading his horse, loaded with camp utensils, by the bridle. This man was known far and wide upon the prairies, as a skillful trapper, a bold hunter, and an Indian fighter of great renown. He had one quality which was his own, in common with many of his class—of boasting of his exploits. Perhaps this trait was a part of his frontier education, learned from the Indians. At any rate Ben exhibited the strange anomaly of a boaster who was at the same time a brave man. The scars upon his body were taken in many a bloody fight along the Yellowstone, by the Platte, on the Washington, and in the Sierras. His step was free and firm in spite of his fifty-five years, and the gray hairs sprinkled in his heavy beard and mustache.

The road lay through a growth of scattered pines, such as grow upon the Black Hills, and among others a few specimens of the nut-pine, known only in the West. Ben stooped to pick up one of the cones, and as he was tearing off the husk to get at the seed he heard a sound which caused him to drop the cone and seize his rifle. The sound was a grunt resembling the grunt of a hog, and looking up, he saw, a few feet from him, an enormous grizzly bear, standing with his head cocked on one side in a knowing manner, regarding the trio in a way which seemed to say that he hesitated to decide which of the three would make the best meal. There is no living mountaineer who does not fear the grizzly bear. Their strength and ferocity can not be fairly stated. Ben knew the danger he had to encounter, and was ready to meet it like a man. The Frenchman aimed his rifle at the animal, but dropped it again at the stern signal of Ben Miffin's hand, who never removed his keen eyes from those of the fierce animal. Cooper says in "The Pioneers," "There is something in the front of the image of his Creator that daunts the hearts of the

inferior beings of creation." And the great student of nature was right. No one knew better than Ben Miffin the power of the human eye, and his never quailed.

"Let me shoot," whispered Jules.

"For your life, don't!" muttered Ben. "If I yer charge tell I give ye the word, and then let him hev it."

"I can shoot him while he stands still," replied Jules.

"Mind me," was the reply. "Keep yer eye on the brute all the time. 'Tain't no use to fire; his hide is like a sheet of iron. Bullets flatten ag'in' it like paper-balls. Darn my hide ef they don't. He's got his eye on my heels; he kaint hev it, mind ye."

All this was said almost in a whisper. The bear had not moved, but was standing in the same place, shifting his head to and fro to get away from the eye of the intrepid man. Ben knew his advantage, but between keeping his young companion from firing, and watching the bear, he had his hands full. At last the bear rose slowly on his hind legs, and opening his jaws, uttered a terrific growl, at the same time showing a set of long, white teeth, at the sight of which poor Jan, who was crouching behind a rock, uttered a yell of terror.

"Keep still, you durned fool," said Ben, without turning his head. "You'll bring him on us ef you show the white feather thet thar way."

Still he kept the eye of the bear. The brute lowered himself upon all fours and suddenly began to retreat. He had not gone ten paces, however, when he turned again and rose upon his hind feet, repeating the menacing growl which he had uttered before.

"Och! Mein Gott!" muttered Jan. "Our valer rich art—goot saints, vat teet! Dere ish no more as fifty teet' in hees jaw. I dinks I ish mooch 'frail."

The bear again dropped on all fours and turned his head up the rocks. But Miffin, who had restrained himself well until now, jerked his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The ball had hardly left the barrel when the savage brute, with a broken fore shoulder, came down the slope on three legs, with a growl which made the blood of the Dutchman run cold in his veins and wisk himself safely back in fatherland. But he took up

the gun he had brought with him from the Rhine, a gun on the pattern of the roer of southern Africa, and with his heart in his throat awaited the onset. Jules Damand fired one ineffectual shot at the savage brute, and then drew his pistols. Ben Miffin saw that he had brought this on the party, and that he was the one to be sacrificed, if any. He drew his knife and was about to close with the bear, when the Frenchman dragged him away.

"Climb a tree," he said. "Take your gun with you."

Each darted at a low pine, and scrambled up as soon as possible, just in time to escape the fury of the brute. He reared himself on his hind legs at the foot of the tree occupied by the trapper, and glared at him seated comfortably in the lower branches. The mouth of the bear was open, and the white foam dropping from the red tongue. He lowered his head and licked the blood from his wounded shoulder. The taste of blood made him more savage, and he gnawed at the tree with his white teeth.

"Where are you, Jan?" cried Ben, not seeing the Dutchman anywhere. "Have you got to a tree?"

"Nein!" replied Jan from behind his rock, "dere ish no tree here. I ish kilt! I ish eaten oop mit a pear! Ach mein Gott! vy you don't shoot 'im? Vire mit de gun at 'im. Dere ish no hope vor boor Jan Schneider, dat ish drue; so help me der saints!"

"Keep yer mouth shet," replied Ben. "The b'ar may miss ye. But ef he noses ye out, dig fer a tree, that's all."

The bear evidently suspected the presence of some one else, though he had only seen the two he had treed. He began to nose about the ground, making toward the horses. But they fled at his approach, and he stopped a little way from the rock where Jan was hidden and began to snuff the air. He then advanced toward the rock.

"Look out thar!" cried Ben; "he noses ye now. Climb up on the rock."

Jan scrambled to the top of the rock, still clinging to his gun. The grizzly reared his ponderous bulk against the rock and saw his enemy. The growl he uttered caused cold shivers to begin at the top of the Dutchman's head and

chase one another down his back and into his boots. The only hope he had was in the gun. He thrust it forward and was about to fire, when his bearship lifted his paw and gave it a playful tap, which knocked it out of the poor fellow's hand, and sent it flying down the other side of the rock. But Jan caught it by the stock and pulled it back. The bear began to climb up the rock, but moved with difficulty, for one leg was useless to him, and every movement was accompanied by a growl of pain. Ben Miffin had by this time loaded his rifle, but the body of Jan was directly between him and the bear, and he dared not fire. The gun of the Dutchman was loaded with a handful of buckshot. As the bear came nearer he lifted the wonderful weapon and pulled trigger. A noise like the report of a small cannon followed, and Jan was knocked headlong from his perch, falling on his head and shoulders nearly ten feet away. He was up in an instant, running for a tree, fearing to feel the claws of the bear in his back at every step. He reached the tree, tugged his weight up to the branches and uttered a shout of joy. He was safe for the present.

"How does ye feel?" said Ben from his tree.

"You's nice man to stand py a frent!" said Jan, in high dudgeon. "You's goot feller. I dinks I cooms out here goot many dimes more nait you. Off auver a man is a goot feller, he vas fite den mit der pear. You's a coward, Feen Miffin."

"Yer safe in yer tree, or durn me ef I woul'n't giv ye the darndest lickin' ye ever got in all yer life. I woul'd, by gravv. Does ye think a man like me is gwine to stand thar? I reckon not. I rather calculate ye've backed up the wrong tree. Jest wait tell I git down, and I'd chop ye inter kin'llin' wood. That's as goot as ef I swore to it."

"Where is the bear?" said Jules. "I can't see him."

"No? Mebbe the Dutchman knocked him over with that blunderbuss of his'n—the darndest weepen! It's got a mizzle like that thar little cannon they've got at the Mackinaw. Mountain howtzer they call'd it. Look sharp again, Jule; kain't ye see him now?"

"Yes, Ben; he lies under the rock, with his head on his paws. He keeps very quiet."

"Mebbe he's shammin'," said Ben. "Don't ye go too nigh the durned critter. It'd be jest like him to git up and go fer ye the minnit yer feet teched the ground. Jan?"

"Vat?"

"Git down outer that tree and go an' prick him with yer knife. Ef he don't git up then we may safely conclude he's a dead b'ar."

"I ain't a fool!" said Jan. "I don't vant nottings more to do mit te bears. You go you'self unt brick him."

"All right," said Ben, "I'll do it; and if he is a dead b'ar, I'll take his sculp."

"Dake him all," said Jan. "I not wants him. Der duyvel! He ish von plack peast. I vash scared mit him."

Ben got down from the tree and crept cautiously toward the rock, keeping it between himself and the bear. He reached it and drew himself carefully up the side. He found the gun lying on the rock where Jan had dropped it, and then, creeping forward, he looked down upon the grizzly. The first look was enough, and he hailed his companions with a shout.

"Safa?" said Jules.

"Dead as a hammer," replied Ben.

Jules slid down from his tree and hastened to join his companion. The grizzly lay where he fell, and they could see that the heavy charge of the roer had passed into the ear of the dead brute, and blown a passage completely through his head.

"Vell, vat you dinks?" said Jan, still in his tree. "If yonse fool me, unt dat pear ish not deat, I gits mad ash ter tuyvel."

"Dead enough," said Ben; "it's all your darned luck. Come down and see him."

Jan slowly left his tree, and came toward them in a hesitating manner, not yet satisfied that the savage was sufficiently dead to be safe. But even he was satisfied when he saw the hole the charge had made.

"Dere," he said, "vat vas I dell you ven you laugh at mine gun. Dat ish goot gun; more ash petter ash goot. It kill

dish pear. All right. Vy den you not kill him mit der little gun, eh?"

"Could do it, ef I had a chainece ter put the barrel clost to his head," said Ben.

"Yaw. Vy you not *do* it, den?" said Jan. "Noh, my dinks you dare do it. I vash not 'vraid, I vash not crime a dree all peecause off a little pear like dat. I kills him mine-self."

"Ye run fast enough after ye shot yer blunderbuss," said Ben. "But that ain't it. Let's git our horses back again. I kin git mine easy enough."

"How?" said Jules.

"This way," replied Ben, raising his fingers to his lips. A loud, clear whistle rung through the hills. Directly after they heard the swift beat of coming hoofs, and the three horses appeared in view, led by the horse of Miffin. He advanced and seized his property, and the faithful animal laid his head against his master, whinnying his gladness. Ben stood a moment stroking his shining mane and his small, sharply head. The horse was a model of his kind—of the mustang breed so much in use upon the prairies. Of middle size, a pure white, with small head, deep chest and long body, with keen eyes and the light step of the deer. There is no better breed of horses in the world.

"Yes, yes, old boy," said the trapper; "ye are one that will always come at my whistle, no matter when I sound it."

"Where did you get him?" said Jules, coming up, with the bridle of his own horse across his arm.

"From the Crows," said Ben. "They are my friends yit. I'll never need one on the prairies. I go back to them once in a while and they always make a feast."

"The horse is a beauty," said Jules, glancing at him.

"He hasn't his ekal on the prairies," replied Ben. "Look for him whar ye may, ye won't find a horse to go as far and do as much and do it as quick as Diamond. I'll say that for him. I've got him to thank for a life saved from the Blackfeet before now. But them days is done. I'm gettin' to be an old man now. I feel it in my bonea."

"Old?" replied Jules. "I'd like to find your match now in this section."

"That's easy enough to do," said Ben; "not but thet the time hez been when I was as spry a young chap as ye'd find atween the three Batters and the Massasipp. I tell ye true, I've seen the time I could lick any thing on the prairie. I couldn't do it now. I'm gittin' too powerful weak, that's the reason, and good enough reason, too. I c'u'd lift a buffer onc't; I kain't do it now. But I'm no chicken to-day."

"Say," said Jan, "vat you do mit my pear?"

"Leave him here now," said Ben. "To-morrow I reckon we'll come back and take him into camp."

"Vat you do mit him?" queried Jan.

"Eat him, of course. Never hed any bear-steak, I guess. I calculate you'll say it's mighty refreshing fodder, once you git any of it."

"Eat a pear! Vy, dat ish wors r dan to eat vrog," said Jan.

"No, not so bad," said Ben, "only the frogs taste the best. I judge you can't beat them very easy."

"All right," said Jan. "I cats any t'ing now; I eat a pear. I says nothings. Pring him vere Jule cook him, unt py tam, I eat him. Dat's all."

"We'll teach ye something about frontier life by the time we git done with ye," said Ben. "I rather guess thet ye will see the time when a baked Injun won't be a bad dish fer ye."

"Paked Injun! Vat; you eat dem?"

"I reckon ther' pooty good fodder too, when you ain't got nothin' else to feed on," replied Ben, coolly.

"I dells you vat," said Jan, getting angry again, "ven I comes to dis coountry I dinks it must be goot coountry, but now I dinks it is no more petter ash a Feejee Island. I vill not eat paked Injun. 'Tish no good; dat ish vat I dinks."

"Ye don't know any thing about it," said Ben. "After ye've been on the prairie a while ye will git over thet and not be half so squeamish. Jest lose yer sculp onc't, and ye'll be ready to eat an Injun raw."

"Stop dat. I veel very bad. I dinks dere is no Injun here."

"Mebbe not. Mebbe the prairie down thar ain't the'r old stamping-ground, and mebbe it is. Anyhow, I've got my opinion, and I'll bet ye my fust beaver ag'in' yours that we see Injuns in less then a week."

"I not likes Injuns."

"Nuther do I. I calculate ther's a good many of jist the same opinion on the prairies. They don't like the sculpin' process. I know a man that hez been sculped and is as lively as a cricket now. More'n that, he hez put forty notches in his rifle-butt sence the Blackfeet took his sculp."

"Vat's dat fer?"

"He makes a notch fer every red nigger he wipes out. But I hear the dam, boys, and there's our campin'-ground."

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAIN DEVIL.

THEY had hardly passed forward a dozen steps, when they were startled by a sudden cry, which resembled nothing earthly. At the same moment came the shout of a masculine voice, evidently in peril. The sounds, coming so suddenly upon their ears, startled poor Jan immensely, and he drew back with a look of horror, but Ben ran hastily forward in the direction of the sound, followed more slowly by the Frenchman. They reached a level spot of ground between the cliffs where they widened enough to leave perhaps an acre of ground inclosed, and upon this spot of ground two men were struggling for life or death. One was a young man in the garb of a mountaineer, who had fallen upon one knee and with his hand clasped about the body of his foe, was plying his knife with desperate energy.

The other was a being clad in skins, a savage, hairy, fearful creature, which could not be called a man. This ferocious

creature had no weapon but a short club, with which it fought with desperate courage, warding off the strokes of the knife, and giving fearful blows in exchange. The nails of this horrible assailant were like the claws of a panther. The teeth protruded over the lower lip, white and savage. As it fought it uttered the cry which had welcomed the entrance of the trappers to the glen. A little way off, a young girl stood with clasped hands, in an agony of terror. Ben had no time to look at her then, but, drawing his rifle to his shoulder, he fired at the grizzly demon, which seemed to have the best of it, and with the satisfaction of seeing the arm which lifted the club over the head of his opponent, drop palsied at his side.

The brute uttered the same ferocious cry which had attracted their attention in the first instance, and turning, it darted up the face of the cliff near at hand, at a place where human feet had never trod. Jules fired at him, but without effect, and he passed over the cliff and disappeared from view, gnashing his teeth and howling like a wounded wolf. Ben ran to the assistance of the young man, who had sunk bleeding to the earth, and raised him in his arms. The girl came forward at the same moment, with a look of tender sympathy in her face which could not be misunderstood.

"How do you feel, Bentley?" she said. "Are you badly hurt?"

"I hope not," replied the young man.

The next moment he fainted from loss of blood, and while they used every measure in their power to aid him and stanch the flow of blood, Ben had time to look at the girl. She was a lady-like woman, with a sweet face, a calm, bold eye, and a trim figure. Her dress was that of the better class of western emigrants, though travel-stained and torn. The young man called Bentley was wounded in a dozen places by the sharp nails of his late assailant, and badly beaten about the head with the heavy club. They raised him in their arms and carried him forward. In a moment more they turned an angle in the path and reached their camping ground. They gathered a quantity of pine branches and threw their blankets on it and laid the wounded man upon it. Ben had some rude knowledge of surgery, a knowledge which stood him in good stead now. He went away and came back directly, holding

in his hands a small heap of leaves. These he placed upon a flat stone and quickly reduced them to a pulver, which he applied to the wounds of the young stranger. By this time he had recovered his senses, and though yet faint from loss of blood, he understood his situation and the care which was being taken for his recovery.

The girl had followed them without a word. There was something in the face of Trapper Ben which inspired confidence in him. No woman could look in his face and feel the least fear of him after it. A good, brave old man, knowing his work, and doing it.

When every thing which could be done for the comfort of the wounded man had been accomplished, Jules Daman built a fire, and began to fry some venison-steaks, which he found in his saddle-bags. There is a natural taste for the fine arts in cookery which seems to be characteristic of the French people, and Jules was no exception to the rule. To see him at work upon a venison-joint would make the mouth of an epicure water. And though Jan was no epicure, he was dreadfully hungry after his tackle with the bear, and watched the process of cooking with a sense of unsatisfied longing which pleased Ben exceedingly.

"Yer hungry, old man?" he said.

"Hoongry? You pet. I'm yooast as hungry ash n' fer vas. Vy you wait so long, Shules? Sh'pose you hurry before I die mit hunger."

"Not I. You will find that it is impossible to hurry meat. It must cook just long enough, or it will not be fit for pigs. You must not expect me to slight my cookery now, when there is a lady in the case."

"Oh, coom, coom. Don't keep him dere no more. I more hoongry efery minnit."

Jules shook his head, and continued his work of turning the steaks with an air of interest in the occupation which only a Frenchman can feel in such labor. At last his work was done, and taking some of the venison on a piece of bark, he approached the young lady, and handed it to her with the look of a marquis offering refreshment to a duchess. And, indeed, the graces of Monsieur Jules Daman upon this occasion would have done credit to any rank in life.

"Yeast look at him," whispered Jan, his sides shaking with subdued laughter. "You tink he shentleman, ven I nefer sees such a vool vile I liss."

"Oh, let him be, Jan. Yer mad because you can't show off before a gal the way he kin. Don't deny it, ye know it's true," said Ben.

"I nefer dolls a man he lie," said Jan, coolly, "put ven I lie I dalks yeast ash you pees dalkin' now. Vat you dink of dat, eh?"

The young lady took the food offered her by the Frenchman, with a smile and bow, and ate with a keen appetite. The others helped themselves, and even the wounded man disposed of a goodly quantity of the savory meat. When they had finished, Jules cleared the table by the summary process of throwing the bark into the river, and they drew up beside the fire upon which Ben threw more wood.

"If it wouldn't be a-kin' too much, young lady, I'd like to know how you kem here. It ain't often we see young an' handsome gals out in the Black Hills."

"You have a right to know, after what you have done for us," she answered, in a sweet voice.

"Now don't ye begin thet 'ar way," said Ben. "I won't stand it. We ain't done nothin'."

"You saved us from that terrible creature."

"Psho! What signifies pullin' a trigger? Thet ain't no trouble to a man thet's used to lookin' through the double sights. Tell yer story, and never ye mind us. We mout hev the will to do ye good, mebbe, s'posin' we got a chaine. What's yer name?"

"My name is Millicent Carter," she answered. "My companion's name is Bentley Morris. We had been part of a party of emigrants on their way to the Far West. I suppose it is the old story to you. We were attacked by Indians in the night, and we are all that they left to tell the story."

"Der Sherasheen!" cried Jan, with a look of horror. "I hate Injuns."

"It was the durned Blackfeet, I'll bet a farm in Nebraska," said Ben. "What? Not one of all the comp'ny left but you two?"

"We alone. By the aid of the strong arm of my friend,

I escaped from that scene of blood and death, at which my heart sickens even now. You will understand that but for him, I should have been one of the victims."

"Millicent!" said the wounded man.

"Be silent, Bentley. It was your bravery which saved me. You came back in the midst of the fray, when you might have escaped alone."

"He's a brave lad," said Ben. "If he denies it, I won't believe him, for he's got it in his eye. Now, don't you say a word. Go on, miss."

"It was many weary miles from this, and we were fatigued and weary before we came so far. We reached the entrance to this place and came in to find a secure asylum for the night. As we passed on I thought I heard footsteps following us and told Bentley. He had heard them, too, and was uneasy. We kept on our course until we reached the place where you found us, and where Bentley determined to pass the night. It might have been an hour after, and he was gathering some sticks with which to make a little fire, for I was cold and wet, when that terrible creature appeared on the rocks overhead, uttering its fearful cry. If I live to be old and gray, that horrible vision will never leave me. I see it plainly now."

"Bar up, miss; don't be afraid. You're safe enough now," said Ben.

"Put vat if dat tuyvel vas to coom pick ag'in, Penn?" said Jan, looking uneasily over his shoulder. "I juss shud mit him now."

"He'd better not. Let him try it on ef he wants to git his gruel. I'm ekal to any low-lived squab of thing like that, I reckon. Don't you be afraid, miss. Ther ain't no danger."

"It is childish in me to fear now," she said, "when I have such able protectors. There, the feeling is gone; I put implicit confidence in you."

"That's right. You might do worse then to trust old Ben Millin. That's my name, miss. Trapper Ben, they call me sometimes. This is Jules Dammah. He'll stand by you, and cook all the vittles. This is Jan Scholten. He can't much to look at, but he killed a grizzly a little while ago, with that

weapon he calls a roer. Don't it roar when it goes off? I guess not!"

"It is a good gun," said Jan. "Don't you make fun off me now, Penn Miffin."

"Who's makin' fun of ye? I ain't. I'm tellin' the lady you're goin' to stand by her, and shoot that durned critter ef it comes back here."

"Do you know what that thing could be called, sir?" said the girl; "it surely can not be a man."

"Don't say sir to me. I'm old Ben Miffin. Please to call me by my name."

"If you like it?"

"You bet I like it. I ain't ashamed of my handle, not a bit. It's a good one, an' I cum by it honest—the way I cum by all my traps. I fight fair for every thing, even with a durned low-lived swab of a Hudson Bay man, an' anybody knows they ain't human. Ye asked me what that critter was. I tell ye fair, I don't know. I've seen it onc't before. Some of the boys hez seen it too, an' they don't know. It's a queer sort of critter. Ef I hed my say about it, I sh'ud think it was half man an' half wolf. It's mean enough."

"It does not talk; but you noticed that it was clothed in skins."

"I seen that. It's a queer critter, I must say. The boys call it the Mountain Devil. It's a good name. It's lucky for the thing that I fired in a hurry; and then the youngster was so much in the way I darsen't fire at any thing but the arm. I hit that."

"It saved my life," said young Morris. "I had no strength to ward off another blow; I felt that my time had come."

"So you might well think. It ain't one man but a dozen hez gone under, time and ag'in, here in the Black Hills. Whatever it is, it hates a man like death. Don't you talk too much, young'un; it might hurt ye."

"Those scratches are nothing," replied Morris. "I shall be well in a day or two."

"Look around ye and see how ye like the place ye've got to live in till we go to the States."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAPPING-GROUND.

THE stream on which they halted was one of the tributaries of the Missouri, the *Cacke la Poudre*, which flowed through the passes of the Black Hills not more than forty miles from Fort Laramie. From the place where they stood, they could see the peaks of the three brothers, the Battes, raising their heads on high. Mount Laramie loomed up in the distance and at their feet the river poured on down the mountain-sides. Near the place where they stood, that sagacious animal, the beaver, had dammed the stream and made themselves home. The round tops of the little huts rose above the water, and knowing heads were peeping out at the strange intruders.

In all probability, no other feet than those of Ben Mifflin had ever trod the banks of the stream, if we except the Indian hunters. The entrance was narrow and crooked, and once in, the eternal rocks seemed to rise on every hand, inaccessible to mortal feet. Low growths of pine and the creeping forms of the cactus were the only vegetation. The silence was unbroken by a single sound. Ben looked at his companions in triumph. They had met him in St. Louis, and he had thought proper to reveal to them his discovery and make them partners in his toils. He was not avaricious, and he told them with no wealth except their weapons, eager to try his trapping-ground. He wished to better their condition, and had taken this way to do it. Personally, he knew nothing of them or their antecedents. But they had appealed to his sympathies in their destitution, and no man ever appealed to him in vain. He had a large heart, open always to the cry of the needy. In another sphere he would have been a philanthropist. In his own, he was only a true-hearted simple man, with only one object, and that to live out his simple life as the Maker whom in his rough way he revered, would have him. Jan had told him wonderful tales of the prowess he had shown in hunting in southern Africa, where he had

been when a young man. It only required a little of the rough experience of the prairie to show him that he was not the mighty Nimrod he had made himself out to be. But, Ben cared nothing for this, and was pleased with the eccentricities of the Dutchman.

"Thar," said the trapper; "ain't that a sight fur sore eyes? Thar's peatrics enough in this yer stream to make us rich all summer."

"Vat ish dem?" said Jan, pointing to the beaver-houses; "who live dere?"

"Injuns!" said Ben.

"Vat?" said Jan, leaping from the earth. "Vy den you comes here? Vy den you no stay at home mit yourself unt not bring me out here vere dey live?"

"Ye never seen a beaver hut, I reckon," said Ben. "Ye won't believe me when I tell ye that them houses ar' the work of beasts."

"Who puild dem houses, den?"

"Beavers," said Ben. "S'arch creation through, and I reckon ye won't find any beast that ken beat them. They're carpenters, masons, and engineers; an' they know the'r trade too."

"Penn Miffin, you ish no more ash von liar. Vy you dry to fool me? How dem peavers coot down trees, eh?"

"With the'r teeth. A lot of 'em git at a tree that stands close to the bank, and gnaw away at it till it falls over. Then they work away with sticks an' stones to make the'r dam, an' when that is done they build the'r houses. You'd better believe they ain't got the'r ckd anywhere in the 'arth. I'll tell ye lots more about 'em, miss."

"Thank you," said Millicent.

"Vell, you comes here to catch dem? Dey too smart," said Jan.

"They are peety smart, that's a fact," said Ben. "But we manage to get the upper hand of 'em somehow. But that's nuther here nor thar. Let's make a cabin. The gal must hev a place to live in. Ye ken use an ax, can't ye?"

"Yaw," said Jan.

They had hopped their horses and allowed them to stray at will about the inclosure, after the traps and furniture had

been removed. Leaving their new friends together, each of the men attacked a pine about a foot through at the butt, and soon cut enough logs for their hut. Both Ben and Jules were old hands at this kind of work, and Jan, when he understood what was required of him, did good service. The logs were cut down, squared slightly, notched at the ends, and in a few hours they began to lay the first in their places. By the time it was dark they had raised the walls four feet from the ground.

"Knock off fur the night," said Ben. "Let's hev something more to eat."

"Yaw," said Jan, "dat ish coot. I pees so moech hangry as nefer."

"Ye've worked well, old man," said Ben. "I say that for ye. Come, Jule, try yer hand at the cookery ag'in. Don't make too much fire. Git dry wood. These yer pine branches make too much smoke unless the'r' dry. Go up ther by the rocks. Thar's an old pine cut down thar, and it will make a good fire. I cut it down when I were here before, miss."

"Vy you 'vraid of too moech vire, Penn?" asked Jan, looking doubtfully around.

"Ye don't know the Blackfeet as well as I do, or ye wouldn't ask the question," said Ben. "Wet wood makes too much of a smoke, and a Blackfoot brave could see a smoke as far off as ye could see a mountain."

"Vell, vat ef he does?"

"Then he would come and scalp ye by the light of yer fire, ef he didn't make up his mind to roast ye a little first. Ther' a pizen, sneakin', murderin' set, an' would make no noise of takin' the scalp of a Dutchman, then I would of skinned 'a beaver. Thet's all."

"Dey very near?" said Jan, looking fearful. "Vy you stay nere?"

"We didn't come out yer to play," said Ben; "an' the Blackfoot thet gits my scalp will hev to fight for it. I've a likin' fer my own ha'r. It growd thar, an' thar it's got to stay until things git so mixed up that I kaint raise a hand to fight for it. I'm goin' to make this yer place a fort before long."

"How you do dat, Penn?"

"Never mind. I've no doubt the Blackfeet will nose us out 'fore we quit, an' when they do, we've got to fight. I count you good for three Injuns. I'm good for ten, and Jule will wipe out eight. So you see they must bring down twenty-two to hev any left to do the sculpin'."

"Jule ain't goot for mooch. I can vip him so easy ash zetting ever vas. I kills oet Injuns, unt he kills dree. Dat's it."

"I'll eat the Injun when you kil him," said Jules. "You'll run from the first one you see."

"Me run vrom an Injun. No, py der saints, I kill auvery one I see, same ash I kills de pear. You prave mans, you two C'ah'oop trees, unt leave poor Dutchman all alone. Yaw; dat ish no goot."

"See yer, Dutchy. I want you to go back to the bear and bring him in. I'm afraid the wolves will git at him ef we leave him thar. You wouldn't have the wolves eat up your bear, would you?"

"I not got time to go pack," said Jan. "I so hoongry, pesides I'm very tired."

"Yer skeered. That's what's the matter with ye, Dutchy. Yer skeered half to death. Ye wouldn't no more go back to the bear then ye would fly. I ain't quite so sure he's dead, anyhow. Isn't that him comin' down the hill yonder?"

Jan leaped up, clasped the trunk of a tree with both hands, and began to climb with might and main, while the others rolled over and over on the ground, bursting with laughter. By the time he reached the first branch he had collected sufficient courage to look about him, and could see no such fearful monster as he imagined coming down upon him. The truth dawned upon him that he was the victim of a sell, and he slid down again in great wrath.

"Yas, that's the worst bear, Penn Millin, in dis coountry. Auvery Yawsee can be goot dead, put you can be more as dat. Dere vas no pear."

"Wasn't thar? It must hev been the rock I seen and I thought it was a bear, sure as shootin'. But ye was skeered that time; ye kaint say ye wa'n't."

"Kin, too! Wasn't scared a bit, Penn Millin."

"Ye wasn't? What made ye climb the tree, then?" said Ben.

"Because I can not see no pear on the ground, unt I climbs oop the tree to look vor him, unt ven I gits dere, I can see no pear. Den I knows dere vas no pear, unt dat you vas no more ash von liar like auvery Yankee."

Ben laughed heartily and turned his attention to the fire which the Frenchman was cooking over the blaze. He had built his fire with all the care of the frontiersman. First, the light leaves were ignited, then some small twigs, which would burn without smoke, were added, and when these had kindled into flame, larger sticks were laid on, and the fire was now blazing merrily, though still without much smoke.

"That's the sort of fire to fool a Blackfoot," said Ben. "Ah, many an I many's the brave fellow hez gone under fer the want of a little care. Now, I don't know that ther's an Injun within twenty mile of us, but I always go to work as if they were all around, as they may be fer all we know, and most likely ar'."

"What makes ye think so, Ben?" said Jules.

"'Cause it's the last of the huntin' season, an' the braves are out for bufler. That's my reason. Then, ag'in, ye kain't depend on a Blackfoot; ther' a treacherous, loss-steadin' set. Mind I tell ye."

"The Crows are just as bad."

"No they *ain't*. Anyhow, they won't be to us while I'm hyar. You see they ain't forgot the'r old chief yet. I calculate I've got a wife among 'em som'ers."

"Don't you know where she is?"

"Kain't say that I do. When I was in the Crow village last, and that's three years ago, she were ther. Ther's a young chief takes care of her on my account, secin' he ain't got no father or mother, an' she sort of adopted him. So I reckon she rubs along right peart. Sae enter, anyhow. Perhaps I couldn't appreciate the woman. I didn't, anyhow."

"Didn't you like her?" said Jules.

"No, I *didn't* relish her much, that's a fact. Ye see she had a tongue of her own, and a mighty sharp tongue it were too—the wust you ever see. She never stopped her clack from mornin' till night. I wouldn't hev minded it so much if she

had only taken a rest onc't in a while, but she didn't. It seems to me now, that the durned critter thought ef she let her tongue rest a minnit, she couldn't start it ag'in."

"What did you do?"

"Do! What any man orter do when he kain't save himself no other way."

"What was that?"

"*Hell!* it ez hard ez I c'u'd go. I reckon that was pooty lively too."

"Vat was your vrow's name?" said Jan.

"Does ye want her, Jan? Ef ye do, take her, with my blessin'. The truth is, yer gettin' too fat, and ef ye hed to stand her jaw only a month ye'd git worked down to yer fittin'-weight pooty sallow, that's all."

"I don't vant her," said Jan.

"Don't refuse on account of any feelin' on my part," said Ben. "Don't be bashful nuther. Or, ef it suits ye better, I'll sell her to ye. I'll sell her cheap too. Give me that huntin'-knife of yourn an' she's yer own. That's fair, I'm sure."

"Don't rent her," persisted Jan. "S'pose she dead, unt I pay her? Den I lose mine goot knife all vor nothings."

"Ef she's dead, may she rest easy in her grave. Bat I don't think she would, any way. I've got my opinion, an' I think she'd never rest in any grave. They won't hev her in the other world nuther. She'd worrit them to death, mind ye."

"Vy don't you dells me vat pe her name, Penn?" said Jan.

"Hill-dah, the Green Snake. Lovely name, ain't it?"

"Goot crack us. Dat ain't a voman's name?"

"Ain't it? Perhaps yer right. I doubt ef she's a woman myself. Anyhow, I've got my opinion and I reckon she's got a devil in her. I hearn a preacher down to the fist tell of a woman that hed seven devils in her, an' that the goot man can't 'em out. Now, ef any one woman hed seven such lively devils in her ez the Green Snake hez, then she must hev

been a healthy female, that's all. How gits on the grub, Jule?"

"Near done, Ben. In five minutes."

"All right. Soon as convenient I'll worry down a piece of that venison. I'd like to make a trade with Jan for this wife of mine. She ain't no use to me, an' I think she'd be just the woman for Jan."

"I dells you again, I don't want no voomans ash vas lev such names ash Hill-a-baloo," added Jan. "Schmucke—Green—Schmucke! Der Himmel, dat ish dreadful! Don't you talk mit me no more 'bout her. I rather gifs you de knife dan marry a voomans like that."

"Wal, I'm sorry we kain't make a trade," said Ben, regretfully; "really sorry. I'd like to sell her to some likely man that would set store by her, an' not run away from her in less than two months. I wouldn't risk a cent that any man could keep his nat'ral senses an' stay with her longer then that, unless he was sorter seasoned to it, same as I was. I'd 'a' been a chief among the Crows now, ef it hadn't been for that."

"Is that the reason you left, eh?" said Jules.

"Ye bet ye! I liked it there fust rate. They never made me go out on the'r war parties unless I had a mind to, though I went out often enough, for that matter. Ye see, I'm down on Blackfeet for more reasons then one; an' the Crows are the nat'ral enemies of them critters. I'd like to exterminate the hull cursed race of them, durn the'r pickers!"

"What makes you hate the Blackfeet so?" said Jules.

"I'll tell yer. 'Tain't less'n ten years ago I was trappin' on the north branch of the Platte with a comrade of mine, a likely chap as you ever see, Jim Johnson was his name, and the best hearted feller in Oregon. We made a heap of pots, ye bet, an' was countin' on a lively time at the forts the next winter. Jim had a gal thar, an' was alius lettin' on how happy he'd be when he c'd see her ag'in. He never did, poor feller. I'd been out to see after my traps, some times on to half a day, most be, an' was comin' home with a load of pots, for we had been lucky all through, an' when I got to the cabin we'd built, thar he lay, with his head split like an egg shell, an' sculped. I looked around an' found Blackfeet signs everywhere, durn the'r hides. I know them, an' I'll make them pay

for it some day. I promised him then, as he lay thar, thet I'd avenge him on the Blackfeet. Mout be I've done it; mout be I didn't. Anyhow I've got my opinion, an' I'll back it thet the Blackfeet are sorry they killed Jim Johnson."

"Do you know who the men are that killed him?" asked Jules.

"Yes. Thar's only two of them on the'r feet to-day, an' they ar' bound to go under ef ever they meet Ben Miffin, or else he goes under—and he don't think he will."

"Who are they?"

"One's a big Blackfoot brave they call Whirling Breeze, an' the other a white livered cuss who claims to be a white man. Precious little civilized blood he's got in his veins, an' that he's got is mighty mean. He's a renegade, an' I tell ye a renegade is the worst of all God's creatures."

"What's his name?"

"Will Markman. They call him by some Indian name. The worst of it is, his white blood shows more then the Indian, an' he is ez handsome a feller ez you ever see. But he's got a cruel heart in his breast. God pity him if I ever meet him."

"Is he a chief?"

"Yes; they like to git a white man on the'r side. He lays round yere smelter, an' does the dirty work of the Blackfeet. Thar's his way, damn him. Why, ye never did see another such critter in yer born days—the worst ye ever saw, I tell ye. Makes no more of takin' a scalp then I do of skinnin' a buster. What ar' ye tryin' to do now, Jan?"

The Texan was craning his neck, looking anxiously up the hill.

"I dinks I sees a Blackfeet," replied the other. "He pees on the hillside yonder."

"Pshaw, Jan; 'tain't no such thing—bestways, I hain't see no such critter myself. I guess ye didn't see nobody."

"Did too, Penn Miffin. Who's a liar? I sees him over dere py dat pine tree. He vas a pig fellows, bratty near so pig ash a horse. I never sees anybody so pig ash he vas. I dinks he pe some shiant."

"Where was he?" said Ben, anxiously.

"Over yonder, mit der tree. I sees him. I dinks all ye

dakes yer gun unt coes to him unt kills him, mebbe it would pe goot plans."

"Haden't you better go yourself?" said the Frenchman, maliciously.

"I dinks I hain't got time," said Jan, quickly. "How can I go ven I can not dell vether dere pe anybotty dere? Penn coes mit himself."

"That's enuff foolin'," said Ben. "Jan didn't see no Injun, I hope. But we are tired with a long journey. Jule, let us fix some sort of place for the gal. I don't like that she sh'u'd hev to rough it like us men."

"You are too kind to me," said Millicent. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Never mind; you ain't got no call to thank me ez I knows on. I ain't gone round gittin' seen things ez thanks this year. Wait till I ask 'em. Jule, you come yer."

They had a good supply of extra blankets; these were brought in, and by the aid of two of them, they curtained off a recess in one corner of the unfinished building, in which they laid the other blankets, and, apologizing in a lonely but heart-felt way for their lack of good accommodations, they allowed Millicent to retire.

It was in the middle of the night when a strange alarm occurred. Jules, who was very tired, had taken up a line of the post of sentry for the first part of the night, and had stationed himself just outside the building, sitting down at the foot of a tree. The hours crept slowly by, and he dropped off into a doze. All at once he awakened to find himself prostrate upon the ground, with some heavy body lying on his breast which pressed him close to the soil. By the ghastly moonlight he made out his assailant to be the creature which they had met that day. It was making no attempt to harm him, but simply lying upon his breast, its long, heavy hands toying with his throat.

Jules Damand was a cool, hardy fellow, and had been in danger before now. But, there was something so frightful in the load upon his breast, that for a moment his heart failed him. He lay silent, and put out his hand toward a pistol by slow degrees.

The strange thing uttered, now and then, a low, chuckling

laugh, horrible to hear. Ben, who lay near the door of the cabin, heard the sound and stirred uneasily in his sleep. Jules, silent as the grave, allowed his hand to slide along the ground toward the pistol-butt. Even the slight motion he made annoyed the savage brute, and he uttered a sort of low snarl. Jules stopped and waited for him to become quiet. He was in an uncomfortable position, flat upon his back, with his right arm lying under the body of the assailant, who grinned and clattered at him, and scratched at his throat with his long nails in a playful manner.

"*Sacré !*" muttered Jules. "If I could only get my right arm free."

He found that impossible ; the whole weight of the hairy body lay upon it and fixed it like a rock. Jules again began to feel for his pistol, and laid his hand upon it, when the hairy palm of the Mountain Devil suddenly closed upon it. There seemed to be something in the touch of the cold steel which roused his hate, for he darted his long nails into the face of the trapper, and left bleeding furrows from brow to chin. At the same time Jules managed to get the pistol partly free, and made a shot at him in the dark.

The creature had some powers of memory ; he knew that the ball which had pierced his arm that morning had been accompanied by a sound like the crack of the pistol, and he sprang away for a little distance, and stood licking the blood from another wound in his arm. The report of the pistol had roused everybody, and they came out in great haste, Ben leading the way with his rifle in his hand. At the sight of him the wild creature bounded away, and hurried up the mountain side. It was plain that he remembered Ben as the man who had injured him in the morning. He snarled and screamed as he disappeared from view, while Jan stood with chattering teeth and shaking limbs, glaring after the form which was disappearing behind the hills.

"Ach, mein Gott ! Dere he ish again. Now you mine vat I says. Dat ish ter tuyvel. Don' you co te say ash it vas not. Dat ish ter tuyvel, unt no mistake. My prains are all lurly-purly. I mos' deat mit fright."

"Shot up. Don't ye see the lady?" said Ben. "Sorry to call ye out of yer sleep, miss, but our friend of this mornin'

hez paid us a visit. See how the black brute has marked Jules."

"So he has. This is terrible. I can not do any thing to help you, Mr. Damand?"

"No," said Jules. "I shall do very well. They are only scratches."

"Very painful ones, I fear."

"A little. They will soon go away. I shall be satisfied if they do not leave deep scars. You had better retire again. It served me right. I should have kept better watch, when I had such treasures to guard."

"Can I be of no service?"

"No. Not the least. Thank you."

She retired again, and Ben found some of the plants which he had used for Bentley's wounds that morning, and made a salve for Jules' face. When this was done, he sent the Frenchman into the house, and took his place as guard, half hoping that the brute would come back, and give him a shot. Twice during the night he heard its eldritch screams, far off in the hills, but it did not come back. Ben stood on his guard however, until the night passed, and the gray light of morning appeared in the sky.

CHAPTER V.

TREED BY A BUFFALO.

THE people in the roofless cabin had slept soundly, after the visit of the wild thing known as the Mountain Devil. Millicent came out, blooming like a mountain rose, and drew from the old trapper a compliment on her personal appearance, which brought new roses to her cheeks. To the surprise of every one, Bentley also appeared.

"You git back to yer nest!" shouted Ben. "Don't you s'pose I ain't got no better business than to be a nuisance to you? You'll get a relapse ef you don't take keer."

"No fear of that, old man," said Bentley, addressing the

trapper in the free and easy style peculiar to the plains. "Don't be troubled. I never felt better in my life. That blood-letting, together with the venison you cook, has done me a world of good. I shall punish your provisions tremendously."

"Waal, as ter that, ye've got a rifle of yer own. I reckon ye kin keep yerself in grub. How does ye shoot?"

"Pretty well," said Bentley. "Nothing to brag of, you know, but enough to swear by."

"That thing tried Jule another back last night. Ye orter see his face. It looks ez ef a hoss an' wagin had drew right over it."

"It is a malicious thing."

"You bet. It clawed Jule up spiteful, and don't make no more of a rifle-ball then you or I would of a flea-bite. Must be powerful tough."

"Powervul!" cried Jan. "Ach, goot cracious! I sees him mineself, unt he vash so pig ash a mountain. I vash scart mit him."

"You had good reason to be," said the young man. "Now, boys, let us get to work. You must teach us what to do, Ben."

"All right," ejaculated Ben. "I'm the boss, then. I'll give you work enough."

The first thing was to finish their cabin and set some traps. Ben taught Jan and Bentley how to commence, and was pleased to find them apt at the business. Jan did not lack for intelligence, and his wits were sharpening by contact with the keen trapper and the volatile Frenchman. The latter needed very little instruction, for he had received his education in the cold region of British America, under the fostering care of the Hudson Bay Company, then in its glory, but suffering from the enterprise of the North-west Company, which had sprung up about this time under the lead of the enterprising German, Jacob Astor. But, Ben Milfin could never submit to be a hanger-on to any company, and his trapping was done on his own hook. The ground he had chosen for his labors was new. As has been said, no other white man's foot had trod it before.

When the hut was completed they built a *cache* to hold their

furs and food. This was necessary. The wolves were numerous and ravenous, and would strip any trap of its contents in a moment. This last labor completed, they started out on a hunt, leaving Bentley in charge of the camp, and of Millicent. An hour's ride brought them to the level prairie, dotted here and there by low clumps of trees. Ben paused, and his quick eye swept the vast plain from side to side. At last his eye brightened and he stretched out his right hand to the east.

"Buffler!" he said.

They followed the direction of his finger, but Jan could see nothing.

"I dinks dat ish von lie, Penn. I does not see von puf-falo."

"Course ye don't," said Ben, contemptuously. "'Tain't to be expected ye *kin*, nohow. Does ye see them black spots, close down to the edge of the prairie, over yonder?"

"Yaw; I sees *dem*," replied Jan.

"Oh, ye *do*. Waal, *them's* buffler."

"Ish *dey* goot to eat?"

"Good! Ye bet yer bottom dollar on that ar', ye may. I calculate thar ain't nothin' in creation to ekal a buffler-hump; no, nothin'. Why, the juices squeeze out'n it when ye set yer teeth in it, like *ile*. Oh, it's *good*. Ye bet I like it. Anyhow, I've got my opinion, and I'll risk a beaver-pelt ye never tasted anythin' half so good. So, *thar!*"

"I dinks I likes him pooty good," said Jan. "Vell, den, ye coos unt kills him pymeptye, pooty soon, unt cools him hump. Vat him hump pe, Penn?"

"The first cut off the *horns*," said Jules.

"I dinks dat ish von lie," said Jan, coolly. "Dat ish too tough. I not talks mit *you*, Shule. I asks Penn."

"I guess ye'll find out what a buffler-hump is before ye've been long on the prairie. But, see hyar. It don't taste half so good unless ye kill it yerself. So ye must try to kill one. I've always said ye'd got good stuff in ye, ef we could only bring it out, an' I reckon we kin do it; eh, Jule?"

"Yes," said Jules. "We'll put him through."

"I don't vant no voolin'," said Jan, in considerable trepidation. "I not likes dat. 'Tis not goot. S'pose you dells

me right how to kill him, all right. S'pose you don't, den I licks you, Shule. Yaw ; dat ish vat I does."

"No quarrelin'," said Ben. "I won't hev it. The fust one thet gits to fightin', I'll fetch him a lick over the jaw thet'll make him sick ; I will, by gravy. Now look out."

In obedience to his signal, the party put themselves in motion, riding at a careful pace toward the black spots, which the experienced eye of the trapper had detected. A light wind was blowing in their faces.

"We've got the wind of 'em," said Ben. "They kain't smell us."

There was a small growth of timber between them and the buffaloes, of not more than a dozen trees. Keeping this in line with them, they were enabled to get within three or four hundred yards of the herd, and peeping out from the trees, they could count them. The herd was small, consisting only of five, headed by a giant bull, whose patriarchial head was slightly elevated, as if he snuffed danger in the air.

"The cunnin' animile thinks somebody is around," whispered Ben. "Oh, what a beauty. But the cows ar' the best to eat. Is yer gun loaded, Jan ?"

"Yaw," replied Jan.

"Then git ready. When I give the word, foller me. Ar' ye ready, Jule ?"

"Yes," said Jules, from between his set teeth.

"Then go it !" cried Ben.

The three horses bounded from the thicket, and before the animals were fairly awake to their danger, the horsemen were upon them. Ben drew his never failing rifle to his shoulder and let fly. The fattest cow in the herd dropped on her knees, and then rolled slowly over on her side, dead ! Jules was equally fortunate, prostrating another by a lucky shot in the brain. Jan, sitting on his horse, endeavored to fire, but, his animal was restive, and he could not get aim.

"Git down !" cried Ben.

Jan, who had begun to learn to obey the old trapper implicitly, leaped down at the word, and pointed his gun at the bull. He fired, and, as usual, found himself rolled in the dust. His horse bounded away leaving him helpless.

The charge of buckshot had struck the buffalo in the fore-

head, and he staggered to his knees. Jan sprung forward with a shout of joy. But this joy was speedily changed to grief, for the animal, which was only stunned, staggered to his feet, and shaking his head, charged the Dutchman, who ran for dear life.

In watching the motions of a buffalo, it is quite a natural supposition that he can not run fast. This is a mistake. In spite of his unwieldy bulk, he can get over the ground at a good pace, as poor Jan found to his cost. Renning was not at all in his line, but he exerted himself to the utmost, and bolted over the prairie at a pace which astonished himself. But he could hear the buffalo lumbering on in the rear, and was conscious that he gained at every stride. At last he reached a tree; but it was too large for him to climb, and the animal was close at his heels. He got the body of the tree between him and his adversary, and the next moment, mad with anger, the brute plunged against it with a shock which startled Jan immensely.

"Goet Lord!" he ejaculated. "Der plack buffalo is a very mat!"

Recoiling from the shock, the buffalo began to chase Jan around the tree. Though large of body, Jan had a decided advantage over his adversary in this sort of a chase, for he could run round close to the body of the tree, while the huge brute was forced to make a circuit. It was simply a question of wind. If the buffalo could run longer than Jan, he would be overtaken and trampled to death, and there seemed a strong probability that such was to be the case. It was a ludicrous sight, in spite of the danger the Dutchman was in, to see him whip round the tree, the flap of his hunting-shirt streaming in the wind, followed by the buffalo, with erect tail, flashing eye, and lowered head. Jan cast longing glances at the little clump of trees a few rods away. If he only could get to them far enough in advance of the buffalo to climb one, he might be safe. But the distance, though short to the eye, was a great deal of ground to go over followed by an infuriated buffalo bull, Jan thought. But he could not hold out much longer and it must be tried. Away he went at his best speed, the buffalo making half the circuit of the tree before he could turn. By this time Jan had gained a

hundred feet, and this was every thing to him. Even this was hardly enough, and though he got to the tree and began to climb, the buffalo bumped against it before he had gained the lowest limb, nearly shaking him from his perch.

The animal drew back, cast a single glance of his vicious eye at the Dutchman, who had just laid his hand upon the lowest limb, and then !—

Bump !

Jan clasped the tree with all his strength, but his feet were swaying in the air above the head of his enemy. In the mean time he was shouting at the top of his voice all sorts of ludicrous appeals for aid from his companions. Ben's rifle had been loaded long ago, but he dared not use it while they were running round the tree, not knowing but that he might injure Jan in some way. Jules made no effort to aid him. The moment he reached the tree, Ben rushed to the rescue, calling Jules to follow, who did so, his face wrinkled with laughter.

Bump !

"Vy you no cooms here?" screamed Jan. "Vy you no shoot dis ugly pig? I can't holt on mooch longer."

Bump !

"Dere he pe ag'in," screamed Jan. "Help! help! Ach, mein cracions! Ven I cooms out here to shoot puffaloes ag'in den I ish von vool, dat ish all. Ach! gootness! Shoot! Vy don't you shoot!"

Ben's rifle cracked; the buffalo tottered like a tower shaken by an earthquake, then fell to the ground. Jules sent up peal after peal of laughter.

"Vat you laugh at?" said Jan, looking down from the tree.

"At you, you great blunderhead," replied Jules.

"Vy you laugh at *me*?"

"Because I like to see a Dutchman run."

"Isa he teat?" said Jan, looking at Ben.

"Dead as a pickled fish," said Ben. "You may come down."

Jan slid down from the tree, walked slowly to the place where Jules sat on his horse, picked him off solemnly, and set him down like an untimely fig. The whole thing was done

in such a deliberate manner that Ben did not suppose any such action intended, and before he had time to think, the Frenchman was down, and Jan's big foot placed upon his breast.

"What do ye mean?" shouted Ben. "Let him up, ye damned fool."

"Vell, vat makes him laff at me ven I pe chase py a puffido?" said Jan. "I dink I delis him somet'ings. Lie dere vile I spoke mit you du or drie dimes."

"Take your foot from my breast!" said Jules, fiercely. "You cursed Dutchman, I will kill you. Let me up!"

"You keep still little dimes," answered Jan, coolly. "I dinks ven a mans laff at anuder, he mus' have a shance to ask him vy he does it. Dat ish vat I dinks."

"Jan," cried Ben, sternly.

"Vat you expects?"

"Let him up."

Jan removed his foot from the breast of the prostrate man and Jules rose to his feet. His first movement was to draw a knife, and rush at the immovable figure of the Dutchman. So sudden was the attack that nothing on the part of the assailed party could have saved him, but Ben suddenly threw up his rifle, separating them. So strong was his arm, that, while holding the rifle extended, the rush of the Frenchman, excited though he was, could not bend it in the least.

"Keep back!" said Ben, "or I'll be into you with some-thin' sharper than a toothpick. What do ye want?"

"I'd have his heart's blood!" hissed Jules. "He has insulted me."

"Come, it's about an even thing. You made game of him, ye know. Then don't make any damned fuss about it. I ain't goin' to stand it. Shake hands. Jan didn't mean any thing."

"I vas met," said Jan. "I'm sorry I did it now. Put vat makes him laff at me?"

"Thar; he apologized. He says he's sorry. He kin't say no fairer then that, kin he? Shake hands, Jake. Darn me if I'm goin' to hev a man with me that holds a grudge like that thar. *Shake hands!*"

"He needn't aff he don't wants to," added Jan. "I ain't 'fraid of him anyway. Put I pe villing to make vrents."

Jules sullenly extended his hand.

"I'd never do it if it was not for Ben," he said. "He's been kind to me. But if you ever lay a hand on me again I will kill you."

"No growlin'," said Ben. "Durn it, kain't a man know enough to make up with a teller and hev no back talk? Come; hyar's lots of work. We've got to cut up these butler. Use yer knife on thet, not on a human."

"Shall we cut up the old one here?" said Jules, throwing off the appearance of anger, although his cheeks glowed yet.

"No. I reckon we won't want any of him but the hump an' marrer-bones. It's jist as Jan says. It's his bufler anyhow."

"Mine!" ejaculated Jan.

"Yes, yours. Didn't ye bring him hyar yerself, say? Of course he's yer own. I'll show ye how to git his hump. Darn me ef ye don't take up the business of takin' the pelt off a critter right handy."

"I vas a *putcher*," said Jan.

"Oh, that's the reason. Wal, ye jist take the hide off'n this yer beast, an' we'll go out an' 'tend to the others. When ye git it off, holler to me, an' I'll show ye how to git the hump an' marrer-bones."

They left him and proceeded to the place where the other animals had fallen. Soon they were busily engaged in stripping the skins from the game, and cutting it up for the convenience of carriage, as Ben well knew how. In the meantime Jan worked away quietly, taking off the skin in a way which none but a professional could do, and singing in a low tone. As he stooped over, something fell at his feet. He picked it up. It was an arrow, stained red on one side, and the other secured white as snow. Jan stood with the missile in his hand, looking this way and that, not knowing whence it had come. The shape was peculiar: the head was double, and of polished steel, flattened as thin as a knife-blade, and as flexible. Jan went to the edge of the woods and called Ben. He started at the sight of the weapon, snatching it out of the Dutchman's hand and looking at it with an intentness which the others could not understand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MESSAGE.

JULES and Jan waited for the trapper to speak. They knew by the expression of his face that the arrow meant something more than any ordinary shaft.

"What does it mean?" at length asked Jules.

"Ye don't understand Injun signs. Look at the color—one half red, the other half white. That's clear Injun. It says ez plain ez a man could speak, 'Git out of this an' we won't hurt ye. Stay hyar an' blood must flow.'"

"How do you know that?" said Jan. "I don't see nothings like that on the arrow."

"Course ye don't. Wal, *I* does. That red half of the arrow means war. The white half sez that they don't car' to kill us, an' ef we go away quietly it'll be all right. But ef we *stay*, they'll kill us. Whar did ye stand when the arrow fell, Jan?"

"I vas skinning te puffalo."

"Yes, so ye was. Wal, that's all right, I guess. The chap is hid som'ers about yer, an' I'm gwine to hev him out. Scatter an' s'arch the woods."

Jan did not like the idea of going alone through the woods, and he followed close on the heels of Ben.

"Git away," said Ben. "None of that. I want ye to git used to takin' car' of yerself an' ye must do it. I said *scatter!*"

Jan reluctantly went away and began to search. Ben glided from tree to tree, bending forward like a hound on the trail. He found at last a place where a moccasined foot had trod. The footmark was small and delicate.

"A gal or boy, by gracious!" said Ben. "Look sharp I've found him."

The others rushed to his side. The trapper stood at the root of a tree which in some way had been torn up by the roots, leaving a cavity below. Before this cavity Ben stooped

and looked in. A single glance showed him an Indian boy, crouching in the darkest corner.

"Come out hyar," he said.

The boy did not move, and Ben addressed him in the Indian tongue, telling him to come out and fear nothing. The boy obeyed, and stood before them, in his simple Indian dress, a blanket thrown over his buckskin shirt. His moccasined feet were small as a girl's. For an Indian, he had a fine, bold face, and his black eyes gleamed with a half-sneering light.

"What do you want here?" said Ben, in the Blackfoot language.

"The sons of the Blackfoot go where they will," said the boy, calmly, toying with the bow which he held in his hand. "Who dares question them in their own land?"

"The son of a chief stands before me," said Ben. "I can see that at once. No one questions the son of a chief as to his *right*. But we are out upon the prairie and in danger. The brave youth can see that."

"It is true," said the boy. "My brother is in danger; it is well that he sees it, for when we know that danger is nigh we can avoid it, and pass away. My brother has seen the arrow?"

"Yes."

"His head is getting gray; he knows the custom of the Blackfoot. They know that he is a just man, though he has killed some of their people. Good—they give him a chance. They let him go in peace when and where he will, so that he trouble the hills no more with his traps and rifle."

"Listen," said Ben, unconsciously adopting the language of an Indian while speaking in their tongue. "I have been a chief of the Crows for a long time; my head has grown gray among them; they taught me not to fear what man can do. Why should we fly from the face of the Blackfoot braves?"

"My father is very brave," said the boy. "But what can he do against so many? What nation is like the Blackfoot? What chiefs are like theirs? They are many, they are strong. Their horses speed like the wind. Their hearts are very strong. There are three white men; they can fight well, but

the braves will sweep them from the earth, when they come in anger."

"We do not fear," said Ben. "We have come to take beaver and we must do it."

"The white men are wrong," said the boy, stamping fiercely. "They think to drive the Indians from the land their fathers left them. I have heard of great tribes in the east, by the big water, who have been driven out and have perished one by one, until they have no longer a name or a place among the people. But it shall not be so with the Blackfoot."

"They must do as they will," said Ben. "We will not go."

"Be warned. If you do not go, look for the blood-red arrow."

"We shall expect it. Tell the chiefs that the Strong Buffalo said so old a head as yours has no business on the shoulders of a boy. Go. You will be a chief."

The boy straightened himself up proudly and turned away. But Jules seized him by the arm.

"He must not go," he said.

"What ye gwine to do about it?" said Ben. "Let go his arm. The first thing ye know ye'll git us into some kind of trouble with yer durned nonsense."

"He must not go, I say," replied Jules, angrily. "Our lives are in danger."

"Ye ain't helpin' us by techin' the boy," said Ben. "Let him go."

"I will not," was the reply.

"Ye won't, eh?" cried Ben, throwing up his rifle. "Then I'll bet my life I make daylight shine through yer karkidge in about half a minute. Drop yer hold."

Jules obeyed sullenly, and the boy, turning a grateful look at the trapper, darted across the prairie. Jules turned to the trapper with a lowering brow.

"You have had your way, it seems. We will see what will come of it. But let me tell you one thing: do not point your rifle at me again, or something may happen to you."

"Don't git up on yer ear about it. I ain't goin' to hev no bloodshed that kin be helped, I ain't. S'pose y'd 'a' killed this boy—and a brave young feller he is too—what good

would 'a' come of it? 'Twould 'a' brought them down on us all the sooner, that's all. So don't say nothing to me."

They finished cutting up the buffalo and returned to camp, walking by their horses' sides, with the skins containing the choicest portions of the meat slung over their saddles. They found the camp as they had left it, and at once built a fire.

"I don't reckon it will do much good to be very careful now, sence the Injuns knows whar we ar'. But, ther's one thing we kin do: we kin make our hut stronger, an' ef they git our sculps they'll nev to fight for 'em. We've got a strong party, an' we don't go back fer no man; no, we don't."

"If we were alone we might do well," said Jules. "But, this ignorant Dutchman—"

"Vat sort of a Doochman?" roared Jan. "You say dat again unt I valls on you unt smash you all mit little bieees so pig ash my thumb."

"Do be silent, Jan," said Millicent. "Do I understand that you have a fear of danger, Ben?"

"'Tain't nothin' new. It's allers dangerous on the prairie," said Ben. "Never you mind, little 'un. We'll take keer of ye."

"I am not afraid, but, I should like to know what the danger is."

"Blackfeet," said Ben. "We met one while huntin' buffler."

"Off you have anyt'ing to say to me, Shule Damant," said Jan, breaking in on the conversation at this point, "I shall pe glad to have you do it. Put, ton't sit dere unt look ash if you would like to eat me. I wouldn't sit goot on your stomach."

"I do not forget that you insulted me by placing your foot upon my breast this morning. You had better be silent."

"Am I frait mit you, Shule? No. I ish not, I dells you blain. Off you like to pe frents mit me dat ish goot. Off you ton't like it, vat do I care? Take your own vay."

"I'll give one of you a back-handed wipe in a minnit!" roared Ben. "Slet up, both of you. Jan, we have got to go and skin the bear you shot yesterday."

"Who kilt ter pear, Peun Miffin?" cried Jan. "Vat it

Shule? Was it you? or was it a pig Doochman named Jan Schneider, eh? Well, I coes mit you off you like."

"I should like to see a bear before he is cut up," said Millicent.

"Would you? Then you shall take Jules's boss, and ride with us. I'll take mine, 'cause I like to ride, and Jan may take his because I want it to bring home the meat. You two stay and watch the camp."

The three rode out of the camp together. When out of sight of the Frenchman, Ben beckoned Jan close to him.

"Why did ye tumble Jules over this morning, Jan?"

"Well, he keeps sayin', Doochmans, Doochmans, Doochmans, till I was tire of hear him. Sh'pose I throws him town on his pack, den he knows ash I vill sitand no nonsense mit him no more. I pces not a vool."

"I'm jubous you've made him yer innimy," said Ben. "I don't like that. I don't want no quarrelin' in my camp. When I take chaps out with me they must be the right kind of men, and not too *kash* in their ways. Now I don't reckon it'll hurt ye much to show him ye ain't afraid of him."

"You are speaking of your companion," said Millicent. "Do you know that I am afraid of him? He has looked at me in a way I do not understand. Did your friend quarrel with him this morning?"

"Yes. Now ther's one thing more atween Jan and me. It looks as ef we'd got to tramp the prairie together for a long time. Now any man that travels alongside of old Trapping Ben, must hev the right sort of pluck. Don't ye see that's always danger in the life of a free trapper?"

"I neter diaks dere was so mooch, Penn. Off I dinks so, ' would not coom."

"All right. Hyar ye ar' an' hyar ye've got ter stay this season. Now I've noticed that when they b'ar ye right down to it ye kin fight ez well ez the best man among 'em. Bat, ye'r' apt to shirk danger ef ye hev time to think an' see it comin'. Now, that ain't the way with a free trapper. They don't like to fight, nuther will they shirk danger, nor go a step out of the way to git clear of it."

"Yaw. Dat ish vat I dinks. You likes to vite. Now I would sooner *run* den fight, if I can."

Millicent laughed at this *naïve* confession on the part of the Dutchman, whose face was the very picture of truth.

"I'll cure ye of that before I quit ye, my boy," ejaculated Ben. "Take my word for it. I ain't goin' to hev no cowardly cuss in my camp. Now ef we meet an Injun, what ar' ye goin' to do?"

"I dinks I would run away so hard ash efer I can," said Jan, with refreshing candor. "I not likes Plackfeet no more ash hogs."

Again the merry laughter of Millicent rung through the pass. Old Ben looked at her with a fatherly smile.

"You'd run away, would ye? Now, don't ye ever go to do it. Fer ef ye do, ez sure ez a gun you git it right through the back. I won't hev no skulkin'. It's no wonder the gal laughs at you. But hyar's our b'ar."

The leaves had rattled down during the night, and drifted so that the body of the animal was completely covered. Ben brushed them away with his hand and exposed the huge body to view. Millicent had never seen a grizzly bear, and it was something so terrible that she could not repress a cry. The wound which the roer had made was exposed to view. Indeed, the top of the head was completely blown off.

"Dere!" cried Jan, in high good humor. "I kills dat pear mit mine roer."

"It was a bold thing to do."

"Vell, I dinks off I vas not kill dat pear, ter pear would kill me," said Jan. "So I kills ter pear."

"That showed great discretion on your part," laughed Millicent. "But, what is the sound that seems to come from below?"

Ben stopped pulling at the body of the bear and listened. There was a pattering sound, like drops of falling rain, and then the pass below them was filled with a moving mass, and that mass was a pack of prairie-wolves, coming on at

**"Their long gallop, which can tire
The hounds' deep hate or the hunter's fire."**

A pack of wolves, mad with hunger. There is nothing more fearful to a trapper. They know too well the vindictive fury with which the black brutes pursue and drag down their prey.

"Togs?" queried Jan.

"Wolves!" shouted Ben. "Heel it, Jan! Git up a tree as lively as you kin. I wouldn't give a beaver-pelt for yer life ef ye don't, and ez for the b'ar—umph! Run for it. Turn the hosses loose."

Snatching Millicent from the horse, he put her into the branches of a low pine and ordered her to clamber higher. She obeyed without a word, and he took another tree close at hand. The horses ran toward the camp.

Jan needed no second bidding, but ran away, with a face which betokened his earnest hate of the animal in question. Wolves! He had heard their ominous howl near his house on the borders of the Black Forest many a time. The ferocity of the animal is wonderful. Jan knew that well. He recognized the lolling tongue, the white teeth. He had heard his father tell of peasants taken in the forest, far from home and dragged down, screaming in vain for aid. Next day their friends would find their bones whitening in the sun's rays.

The pack uttered fierce yells at the sight of the man, and rushed at him. But Jan got to a tree in season, taking his gun with him. Down came the pack, snarling, snapping at each other, and scattering the leaves on either side. In a moment they surrounded the trees in which the trappers had taken shelter, leaping up against them, gnashing their white teeth and clawing at the bark. Millicent uttered a cry of terror.

"I dinks I puilts a 'ouse in a dree," said Jan, despairingly. "I has been drove to a dree more ash dree times since I cooms here. I dinks dat it vas von coontry vere dey liss in der drees."

"Ye oughter be glad ye've got a tree so nigh," said Ben. "The durned animiles would 'a' tore ye to pieces in half a minnit more. Thar! They've found yer b'ar. Don't boller, gal. They kain't get at ye."

A dozen fierce jaws were tearing at the rough hide of the grizzly, and others struggling to get a taste of the coveted flesh. Jan was in a rage. His "pear," the trophy of his valor, the beast he had killed with his own hand, to be devoured before his eyes by a pack of hungry wolves! He was in a towering passion.

"I dinks dat pymepeye I gets down unt kills auvery volf in dat flock. Look! See how dey shpile my pear! I kills dat pear myself."

"I'm satisfied thet 'tain't our hide the'r' a tearin'," said Ben. "Thet's ail right. Let 'em eat. Then mebbe they won't be so hungry for us. I guess we may ez well drop a few of them while we've got the light."

He raised his rifle and was about to fire, but a second thought caused him to lower it. "No, 'twon't do to make them any madder then they ar', or the obstinate brutes will stay hyar a week but they'll hev us. Durn a wolf, anyhow. What do they want to chase us for jost now?"

"Shupose I shoots my can at dem vunce," said Jan. "I shoots fivif or sax mit one dime. Look; I shoots dat run over dere."

Jan leaned forward and fired.

The charge flew among the wolves about the body of the bear, wounding several of them more or less. At the same time the branch upon which the Dutchman was sitting broke, and he fell to the ground. The wolves fell back at first, but, seeing only one man, rushed at him on every side.

The German then showed that he was brave enough, if need be. The heavy gun was swung above his head, and the iron-bound butt descended on his foes with mighty force. The first brute fell with a crushed skull. Ben Miffin was not the man to see a comrade in danger and not come to his aid. He sprang down, scattering the cowardly creatures right and left.

The diversion enabled Jan to get back to the tree. Ben made a last rush at the wolves and then climbed to his perch again, leaving a portion of the flap of his hunting-shirt in the jaws of the foremost brute.

"Git a stronger limb this time," said Ben. "Don't fall ag'in; ef ye do, durned ef I'll help ye."

The pack now recommenced the struggle for the possession of the bear. Here and there an old or weak wolf was being throttled and torn in pieces by his comrades.

"A hungry lot," muttered Ben. "I wish they'd clear out. I don't want to stay up hyar all night, an' I ain't goin' to. Come sassies, git done yer meal an' clear out."

"Penn," said Jan in a slightly tremulous voice, "can voffs climb drees?"

"Climb trees, ye durned fool! Of course they kin. If they was in any hurry for ye they'd 'a' been up that thar tree half an hour ago. Oh, I reckon yer cat's-meat ~~was~~ *was*. Say yer prayers, ef ye've got any. I think ye'd better, anyhow. It's the last chaine ye'll hev."

"Don't talk dat vay, Penn," said Jan. "Vy you likes to scare a poor Doochman all to biees? I delis you I don't like voffs. Dey ish got long teeth like nails. I dinks dey pe very hoongry. Vell, shpose I gits to St. Louis once more, I goes pack to Yarmany mit a bucket. I not shays here."

"I judge ye won't git back to St. Louis," said Ben. "Them chaps don't look much ez ef they meant to let ye, do they? I judge not. Anyway, I've got my opinion, and I'll back it, thet they begin to gnaw ye in just ten minits by the sun. They make short work of a Dutchman."

"Don't I know you, Penn Miffin? Don't I know you so vell ash never vas? Dey can't climb no more as a pig. You's a liar, unt you knows you pe a liar. I never sees a vorse vun."

"Jest wait a bit, my lad," said Ben. "I'll come to you by and by."

"I'd rather pe licked py a man dan swallowed py a voffs," whimpered Jan. "I fights dem, anyway. I pees not afraid of dem no more ash you. Coom; vy you no shoots?"

"Shet up!" said Ben. "Somebody is coming. Hark!"

CHAPTER VII.

INDIANS!

As he spoke, the wolves scattered right and left, and ran in terror up the gullies at the sides of the pass. The men in the trees remained still as death, one from terror, the other from caution.

There was good reason for the hasty flight of the wolves and the silence of the men hidden in the trees. A band of savages were coming down the mountain pass, admirably mounted, dressed in the gaudy style of the Indian warrior, with flaming feathers and beaded garments. Each poised in his right hand a long buffalo-lance, which they managed to carry gracefully, without appearing to incumber them. Some of them bore a small shield of buffalo-hide, but most of them rather depended upon their own activity than this slight defense. In front of the band rode a tall chief in a rich costume, with a belt of worked wampum thrown over his shoulder and buckled about his waist. He eschewed the lance, and carried instead a beautiful rifle. His figure was commanding, and he had a noble head, a nose cut like Casar's, and a firm mouth. His eye was black and piercing. His hair long and dropping on his shoulders. By his side, armed in every respect like the elder, rode the boy who had been taken prisoner by the trapper on the prairie and threatened by Jules.

The party might have contained a hundred in all, and a single glance convinced the trapper that they were Blackfeet. They pulled up at the skeleton of the bear, uttering cries of surprise, for, of all animals, they think the grizzly bear the fiercest, and most to be feared. They dismounted and examined the body. The head had been untouched by the wolves, and the gaping wound was revealed.

They crowded together about the body, chattering loudly, putting their hands into the wound, and evidently wondering what weapon could have inflicted it. Even the chief descended and looked at the body.

"They have great guns at the big wigwam which make a hole like this," said he gravely. "This is a white man's work. It is not a rifle."

"Can a white man carry a great gun on his back?" said another Indian, in the dress of a chief. "I can not understand. Some medicine-man has taken the life of the big bear of the hills. It is no common gun."

"Wah-be-o-win says well. All the white men are great medicine. My race pass away before them like trees before their axes. But Whirling Breeze will not live long enough to see the work done. While he is alive, there will be war between his people and the white men."

"Why should we not make peace?" said a chief who had not spoken before. "Why should we fight against those who are stronger? I have been to the forts and I have been to the towns by the big water. They have talking-houses which make them flour, and guns and powder. They took me into these talking-houses, and showed me what was done. Why not be friends with them, since they be stronger than we?"

"Peace, Red Arm," said Whirling Breeze, angrily. "The Blackfeet shall never bow the knee to the white men. They will die one by one, but they will never yield to the destroyer."

"Let us find those who have done this," said the chief, Wah-be-o-win. "We will take their scalps as a beginning."

Whirling Breeze gave a signal, and all the braves bounded into the saddle and rode away down the pass.

Ben stretched out his head and watched them anxiously. There were two passes through the hills, and if the Indians would only take the wrong one it would give the whites a chance to run down and apprise their comrades of the danger. A moment of breathless suspense, and the party turned into the pass leading to the hunter's camp.

"It's all up," said Ben. "Poor Jule is done for, an' that young chap Bentley. Come down, Jan. We must get out of the way as soon as possible. The durned thieves won't be long gutting the concern."

The old trapper helped Millicent from the tree. Jan came down in great haste and followed Ben's lead. He turned into

the second pass before mentioned, and hurried down it half a mile. No concealment of the trail was attempted; but at last they reached a place where there was a break in the rocky sides of the cañon, and up this went the men, with their guns at a "right shoulder shift," using one hand to assist them in climbing. Ben looked back once at Jan. All traces of fear had left his face, and his compressed lips told of a steadfast determination. Ben nodded, and muttered to himself. Millicent followed them bravely, pale, but evidently not from fear.

"He'll do; I'll cure him," muttered Ben, "an' the gal is good grit, too."

The pass grew steeper. They slung the guns over their shoulders by the straps, and used both hands in dragging themselves up the ascent. They had to stop now and then to assist Millicent. Jan was puffing like a grampus. Millicent could hardly see why Ben had taken this course. From the spot where they stood they had a complete view of the valley and its occupants. It was already crowded by the Indian band, who were running about at will, peeping into the cabin, overturning camp-utensils and snapping the springs of some square traps which had been left in the cabin. Ben looked in vain for the Frenchman. He had hidden somewhere on the first approach of the savages, and a number of them were scattered up and down, searching for him. It was clear they knew all about the camp, and the number of its occupants. Bentley was nowhere in sight, and Millicent began to hope.

"They don't seem to tar things much, as yet," said Ben. "I expect to see the dry bones rattle pretty soon. They kain't help but burn us out. It's in the'r natur's, the condemned critters. I wisht I had about a hundred Crows here, I'd make the feathers fly in that thar company, I would. Durn a Black-foot!"

"Vare pe Shule gone, Penn?" said Jan. "I not see 'im noverea. Unt vere ish Pentley?"

"No more I don't know, Dutchy. They've got into kiver som'ers. But they'll nose them out, ye see ef they don't. A Blackfoot is wuss then a hound on a cold scent. Lordy! they ain't got no chainece! An' fer my part, I don't see whar

they kin hev hid themselves. Thar ain't no hole thet I know on."

"Vat ish de Injan doin' mit de loss?" demanded Jan. "Shpose dey *shteal* 'im?"

"Steal him! They'd steal the cents off'n a dead Dutchman's eyes. Ye don't know Blackfoot. I do. They ain't wuth a cuss. I wouldn't take the offer to buy out the hull tribe, ef I c'u'd git 'em for a beaver-skin. Not the hull tribe. The'r' in a state of ginerol cussidness thet is alardin'. I kain't go a cent on 'em. An' ef they take that loss, I'll exterminate the hull tribe. Don't look skeered, miss. I reckon the young man is safe hid."

"I dinks it would pe petter to keep away," said Jan. "I don't dink it vould pe right to fite mit a dribe. I dinks dey vip us."

"Don't ye believe it! I consider myself capable of cleanin' out the entire tribe. I kin do it every time. I kin do it just ez *eazy*. What's a little tribe of Injuns to a white human of my mental and moral caliber. I'm ez good ez a dozen missionaries, I am. A missionary talks to 'em a while, an' they listen till they git tired, an' then take his scalp. They'd take it before, only they kain't understand a word he sez, an' it don't hurt 'em. Now I cum of a strong family, an' that kind of moral suasion ain't my best holt. I don't reason with 'em thet way."

"How you do it, Penn?"

"I put a ball right through the'r karkidges, an' then I kin reason with 'em to great advantage. They understand what I mean."

"Vat ef he pe dead, Penn?"

"That's the beauty of my style. He kain't resist the line of argyment I hev adopted. He appreciates its force, I allow. Don't ye see?"

"Yaw. Kill him unt den talks mit him. Dat ish goot vay! I does him myself, pymepye, ven I kills an Injun."

"I reckon ye'll hev a chaince, one of these days. What ar' they prowlin' roun' thet beaver-dam far? The'r' after my traps, the sneakin' varmints. It'll bother 'em some to git 'em anyhow; I'm rather good at lidin' traps. But I'll mark every

Injun in the party, an' one of these yer days we'll hev a settlement. Keep out of sight. Ef they see us, they'll never rest till they git us. Lay low!"

"All right, Penn. I dakes care. I no likes to fight mit dem unless I have to; put vat I dinks ish dis: Atf'n' man ash vas want to live so long vat he can, vill not vite vor his life, ven he *laf* to do it, den he vas vun pig vool. I not like to vite. I pees not a vitin' character. Put off de *coons*, I kills all of dem vat I *can*. Dat ish drue vat I del you."

"That's the right kind of talk, old man," said Ben. "I like that. It sounds like a man. Don't rush into danger, but don't *doze* it. That's the way to talk it. That's the way to be sensible. Kin ye see any thing of Jule yit?"

"I don't see him noveres," replied Jan.

"I kain't think whar he's hid, or what them buggers ar' pokin' round that dam fer. He kain't be thar, kin he? Ain't one of them Injuns goin' into the water?"

"More ash vun of 'em," said Jan. "More ash a tozen, I dinks."

It was true. A number of the Indians had gone into the shallow stream, and were wading toward the dam, approaching the beaver-hut nearest the shore. One of them approached the opening and climbed up on the dam. Another followed, and they commenced taking off the top of the hut. Beavers do their work well, and it was the work of some moments. At last the top was removed, and they stooped together and dragged something out. Was it a beaver? No; but James Damand, who had ensconced himself in the hut as a hiding-place.

They passed on to the next hut, and in like manner dragged out Bentley Morris, who had taken refuge there. It was with the deepest sorrow that the party on the mountain saw their ill-fated companions dragged from their places of refuge, amid the exultant yells of the savages, and conducted to the *dance*. They made no struggle; indeed, any resistance would have been useless against such a force.

"They are taken. Oh, gracious heaven, they are taken. What will be their fate?" cried Millicent.

"I kain't tell," said Ben. "They may kill 'em, but I don't

think it. Jule has got the wust chance, fer he tried to kill the boy."

"Poor Shule," said Jan. "I pees sorry I gits mat mit him unt wrastle him town on his pack."

"The least they kin nope fer is to be pris'ners of the Black-foot fer years. Poor lads. I'd give anything to set 'em free. But, what kin I do; *what* kin I do?"

The prisoners were dragged out into the open space and questioned angrily. Whirling Breeze stood in front of them for a while, and then, taking Jules by the shoulder, he led him into the cabin.

"He's tryin' to git him to tell whar we ar' hid," said Ben, chuckling hugely. "He'll make a good deal out'n Jule, I reckon. Take keer not to show yerself, gal, it won't do. Ef they catch sight of a woman, they'll foller her till doom's day but they'll ketch her. But we've got things our own way. Ef Jule *knew* he wouldn't tell, and as he don't know whar we ar', he *kan't* tell. So we ar' safe two ways, don't ye see?"

Shortly after, Jules and Whirling Breeze came out of the cabin, the Indian excited and gesticulating violently. The sound of his voice even reached the rock on which the watchers stood. But, they could not distinguish his words. At last they bound the prisoners, and placed them on horses. This done, the entire band trooped away.

In a few moments all was still, and nothing remained to show that a visit had been made but the two broken beaver-huts, a few scattered beads, with here and there a broken shaft, a feather, or a worn moccasin. To the surprise of the trapper, his horse, which had run back to the camp when the wolves attacked them, was left at liberty as well as the Dutchman's. Millicent had sunk down upon her knees, her face buried in her hands. The man who had saved her from deadly peril, who had placed his own life in jeopardy to save hers, who had kept up his courage and hers in starvation and fatigue, and had taken deep wounds in her behalf, was a prisoner in the hands of a bloodthirsty enemy!

She never knew her love till now.

"It's hard, gal," said Ben, sadly. "I agree to that. But it happens often out hyar on the plains. I'm sorry. But we couldn't help it."

"He was a brave man," she said, sobbing. "He saved my life twice, and now he is gone."

"Don't you give it up. Thar ain't no use of *that*. Pshaw! He may git away. He's a bright young chap, and he may be clear. Let's hope so. Blame it, he hez got a good chance. Let's go back to camp. Ar' you goin' with me, or will you stay hyar, Jan?"

"I coes mit you, Penn."

"That's right. Stick by me. You scratch my back an' I'll scratch your back. I know what they'll do with Jule. He will hev a four-ounce ring in his nose, and be painted red, yellow and green. I wouldn't mind *that* ef they won't kill him. I've wore the chief's paint myself, and it ain't so bad to be chief in a tribe, and I judge he'll be a chief ef he don't make 'em too mad at him."

They began to descend into the camp from the spot where they stood. It was difficult, more so than on the other side, and needed a quick eye and hand to accomplish the descent without the greatest danger. A fall would have been certain death. They took Millicent between them, and aided her down the perilous path, the strength and skill of Ben standing them both in good stead in a hundred ways before they accomplished the distance. The loose slate slipped under their feet, and it was with a feeling of heartfelt satisfaction that he saw his two companions safe on the solid earth below.

"Well done, miss; well done, old boy; I knew ye hed the right sort of stuff in ye. This climbin' about among the rocks is my best holt, an' ye kept even with me. Thar ain't many could do it, an' I may safely say no woman's foot ever trod whar yours did to-day, miss. It's somethin' to be proud of, an' I'm really proud of comin' down thar. Now then, put yer best foot foremost, an' let's see what damage the brutes hev done in the camp."

"You objected to my calling you *sir* the other day," said Millicent. "I must quarrel with you now, father Ben. My name is Milly."

"Pshaw, now!" responded Ben, with a delighted look. "Ye don't mean to call the old man by *that* name, do ye?"

"Yes; all my hope is in you now; you must call me Milly."

"Yer a sweet gal, Milly; the man thet couldn't fight fer ye don't deserve the name of man nohow. Now look yer. I'm goin' ter save yer young man—you see ef I don't! I'll save him or lay my bones by the Powder river; thet's ez good ez swore to."

"If you could save him, father Ben, I should love you always, dearly."

"You would? And ye called me father Ben? All right. We'll see ef thar ain't suthin' yit in old Ben Millin."

They hurried to the hut and entered; every thing was in confusion, and it was some time before they could collect the scattered articles sufficiently to see that not one had been removed. Every thing remained intact, to the utter surprise of Ben, who knew that Blackfeet are born thieves. In all his experience, he had never known them to enter a camp and leave any thing which could possibly be taken away; and there were many little articles, such as traps, blankets, knives, hatchets, and the like, much coveted by the Indians, lying about in every direction, untouched. Ben looked about him in amazement.

"I've seen a good many things in my time, strange things too, but this beats all natur'," he said.

"Vat beats?" said Jan.

"They ain't stole a *thing*; they've even left our horses."

"I dinks dese pe coot Injuns," said Jan, with a grin.

"Good! Git out! Don't be pokin' fun at a chap in yer old age. The world is comin' to an end; don't say it ain't; I know better. I went down to Selkirk last summer, an' thar was a chap thar preachin' that the accounts of the world would be brung to a close jest about this time; an' the damned critter was right—a Mill'rite, they called him."

"I know vat dey pe; dey sits on a stone in der mill, unt dere little chisels, unt go chip, chip, chip on der stones; dat ish vat a Mill'rite pe."

"Ye git out! 'tain't no sech thing; this lyar critter was a *preach'er*. He was a long-haired, lanky chap, with jaws ez long ez my knife. I didn't believe him then; I do now. Blame me ef I ever hern tell of sech a thing. Come hyar, Diamond."

The white horse, which had been straying at will about the

cañon, came at his call, and rubbed his beautiful head against the trapper's shoulder. The old man returned the caress by gently stroking the silken mane and putting it back from the ears of the noble animal.

"I kin forgive 'em a good deal, seein' they left ye to me," said Ben. "Ef they'd taken ye away, old hoss, I'd 'a' gone for 'em in a way that would hev set 'em back sev'ral files, tho durned critters."

"Penn," said Jan, "somepoty's a-coomin'."

"Whar?" said Ben.

"Listen, unt you hear 'em. A horse is valking dis way."

"Git to kiver then. Into the hut; it's the only place. Blame my cats ef they ain't comin' back."

They plunged hastily into the cabin and barred the door. This done, they went to the side looking toward the entrance to the cañon and watched. They could hear the hoofs of the coming horse, and make out that he was advancing slowly. At last the head of the horse appeared in view, then the rider, and they saw who it was. Jules Damand! His hands and feet were tied, and he could urge his horse forward only very slowly. Both the men started out eagerly to meet him, followed by Millicent. They cut his bonds and assisted him to alight.

"Ve thought you vas teat," said Jan.

"I thought you war gobbled," said Ben.

"So I was," said Jules, coolly, with a sidelong look at the ace of Millicent. "Bat you see I have escaped."

His manner was constrained, and he tried to avoid the eyes of his companions. To their questioning he made answer that the Indians had ridden out upon the prairie, and soon after entered a defile in the hills—a dark and narrow pass. In this pass he managed to make his escape, leaving Bentley in the hands of the enemy.

"Couldn't you 'a' managed to cut his bonds loose, or least-ways to give him a wink somehow?"

"No, I couldn't," said he, rather sulkily. "You don't seem over glad I got away."

"Ain't glad we ar' to see ye, though ye didn't bring the young man with ye. It does my heart good to see ye. I gave ye up for a goner. Lordy! when Whirling Breeze gits

his claw on a white man, he ain't got much chance, unless the Injuns take a shine to him ez the Crows did to me. Did ye hear why they didn't take our traps?"

"Something which the boy said; he is a son of Whirling Breeze."

"I thought so; they ar' alike ez picters. I'm glad I did the boy a good turn. I kain't git it through me how Whirling Breeze ever let them traps alone. And the hosses! Who ever hern tell of an Injan leavin' a hoss he could steal jest ez well ez not?"

"Never mind the boy; I will remember him to his cost," said Jules.

"Where did you leave them?"

"About five miles to the east."

"Then the pass they went into lies south of the big hills, don't it?"

"Yes."

"Then I know whar they mean to camp," said Ben, "and thar's goin' to be the only place whar I stand a chance of gettin' that boy out'n the hands of the darned Blackfeet. It's got to be did, if old Ben Mifflin kin cipher it down. I don't know that I'd do it fer his sake, but fer the gal."

"You seem to take a great deal of interest in her, don't you?" said Jules, with a half-sneer which Ben did not at all like.

"To be sure; don't you?"

Jules Damand laughed in a strange way, which by no means pleased Ben. Indeed, there was something in his conduct lately different from the frank and open manner which had won the sympathy of the old trapper, in St. Louis. Even the stolid German observed the change.

Millicent drew the Frenchman aside as soon as she could do so.

"Was Bentley down-hearted? Did he despair?" she asked.

"Who? Do you call him by his first name? What is he that you should take so much interest in him?"

"He is my very dear friend. You do not answer my question." She spoke in rather a haughty tone.

"He was down-hearted indeed, and with good reason. He

is either going to a hopeless captivity or certain death, and he lacks the spirit to escape, as I did."

"Sir?"

"Well, what now?"

"No man dare say to me that Bentley Morris fears to attempt any thing a man may do. You shall not traduce him. I believe that you hate him, though I can not imagine the cause."

Doman slowly left her, with a savage gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOWING HIS COLORS.

NEXT morning Ben was on his feet early, and mounting the white horse, he went away alone, leaving Millicent in the care of the Dutchman and Jules. He whispered in the ear of the young girl that he would either bring her lover back to her, or leave his bones upon the prairie. She had the utmost confidence in him, and felt a certain elation at heart as she saw that the brave old man was determined on the enterprise. Jan, who was fast learning to trust in him, wished to go too, but the old trapper would not allow it, and resolutely ordered the Dutchman to return, which he did, with several Dutch explosives, not proper to enter in this book.

Left with these rough men in camp, Millicent had not the slightest fear. She knew that the Dutchman, in his rude way, was her knight, ready to defend her from insult of any kind.

"I am afraid that father Ben will get into danger on my account," she said.

"Oh, Penn ish not afraid," said Jan, looking at her with a broad smile, as she sat down upon a stump near him. "Penn so prave ash nefer was."

At this moment Jules, who had been leaning against the door-post of the cabin apparently in deep thought, came up and whispered in her ear.

"What do you want?" she said, without turning her head.

"I wish to speak to you for a moment," he replied, in the same tone.

She rose and followed him to the river side, where she sat down on a fallen log and he took a position a few feet away, regarding her earnestly.

"You wonder what I can have to say to you," he said. "In the first place, give me your promise not to reveal it to a living soul. It applies to this Bentley Morris."

Without thought, never dreaming that the purport of what he had to say could in any way apply to her, she gave the required promise.

"You must know that I am a man whom the bad fortune of life has pressed to the earth. Time was when my family stood high in rank and wealth. That time has gone by, and step by step I have been forced down, until I own not a foot of land in all the world. What of that? I am Jules Daman, yet, and will carve out a way to fortune with my own right arm."

"I am sorry for you," she said. "Is this what you have to say? I hope you may succeed."

"It is the prelude only," he answered. "I wish to make you understand that, though you find me a poor voyageur and trapper, I am still equal in rank to yourself."

She was silent now. A woman of quick wit, she saw at once toward what he tended, and knew no way to stop him. She was not astonished when he went on:

"I love you, and wish to make you my wife."

She was on her guard immediately.

"You do me too much honor, Mr. Daman. It seems to me that the few days we have been acquainted are hardly sufficient to warrant you in taking this step. You will excuse me."

"Not without an answer."

"It seems to me there is but one answer. I must decline your proposal," she answered, firmly.

"I supposed as much. That is nothing. I am prepared for any thing. What if I tell you I have a way of compelling you to accede to my demand?"

"If you were to tell me so, I think I should say you told a falsehood."

"Then I should feel called upon to prove my words true. In the first place, then, you have a sort of feeling for the young person known as Bentley Morris. What if I were to tell you that his fate depends in a great measure upon you?"

"How can that be? He is in the hands of the Black-feet."

"I am aware of it. Yet I am ready to attest upon oath that I have the power of freeing him from captivity, or at least of saving him from death. I am rather inclined to the opinion that they will roast him. I should be sorry to have that done, really, as I have nothing against the young gentleman, except the penchant you have for him, which is not his fault, poor fellow. Be merciful. Save him from this dreadful fate."

"You are a wretch. I suspected you all along, and now I am sure of it. You are in league with the Indians."

"Ah; you have great penetration."

"When father Dan returns I will inform him of this."

"You forget. You are pledged not to say a word. Remember that."

"You trapped me into a promise which I ought to break," she answered.

"Yet you dare not. I tell you that the fate of your lover hangs upon my life. I am not likely to give you up readily. I repeat that I love you. A Frenchman loves in a moment, and forever. Beware what you do, and above all, keep silent."

She knew that she was in his power. He landed lightly, and laid his hand upon her shoulder. All the passion in her nature was aroused, and she struck him in the face with the flat of her hand. He stepped back a pace and put his hand to a knife instinctively. A flush of blood rushed into his face. Jan, from where he was sitting, saw the action, and rushing forward, thrust his heavy body between them to save his generous fist under the nose of Duke, who recoiled at the sight.

"She struck me," he cried, angrily. "I will make you repent that blow so bitterly that you will wish you had never been born, rather than have raised your hand against me."

"You drove me to do it," she answered.

"Vat you say mit her, Shules Tamant?" demanded Jan, his fist vibrating to and fro in front of the Roman nose of Damand. "Yoost you shpeaks now, vile I dalks mit you. I wants to know yoost all apout it. Off you say a vord mit her vat ish not goot, I vill preck you in so many ash vorty t'ou and bleeces."

"I will make daylight shine through your body in a moment if you do not take care," said Damand. "Get out of my way."

"I von't! I shtays here yoost so long ash I haf a mind to. Now yoost you look here. You's a vool, you is. I nefer sees such a vool in all mine life. Auver a man knows any t'ing he know petter ash to talk mit a vooman, unt put a kant to a knife."

"Stand aside," roared Jules, whipping out his knife. "It will be better for you."

Jan instantly knocked him down in spite of his knife, and tied his hands and feet. When he recovered from the blow Jan had conveyed him into the cabin and shut the door. He writhed about in his bonds.

"Jan!" he bawled. No answer. "Jan Schneider!"

A silence like the grave. After he had roared himself hoarse Jan thrust his head in at the door and said quietly:

"Vas you callin' *me*?"

"Of course I was."

"Berhaps you ton't know I've got a kantle to mine name, Mister Shules Tamant? Beeples call me *Myndler* Jan Schneider."

"Come here. I want you to untie these straps."

"Hein?" cried Jan, in astonishment.

"I want you to let me go."

"Geh zum tuyfel! Ven I lets you go, I vas a very big vool. You t'ink you coom rount here unt haf eferyt'ing your own vay? I dells you goot ash you can nix do nothings."

like dat. Ven Penn coomes pack, mebbe ve t'row you in der vasser."

"Oh, but this is more than a joke, Jan. Untie me. This has gone far enough. I did not intend to use the knife."

"No more den I intent to use mine vist. Unt I did intent to use him *goot*. How your ear veel pout dis dime of ter day, Shule?"

"Will you, or will you not, release me from these bonds?"

"I vill not, unless you bromise to peg der bardon auver der young lady."

"I'll never do that."

"All right. Den shtay vere you pe until Penn coomes pack."

"I'll beg her pardon."

"Vell. Den you must yoost peg my bardon," said Jan.

"Yours. *Sieré!* I will never do that, at any rate," roared Jules.

"Goot! Den shtay vere you pe. I don't vant to let you co."

"I'll do any thing you ask."

Jan went away and was gone for a few moments. Then he came back and set the Frenchman at liberty. He at once hurried to the place where he had left his arms. They were nowhere to be found, and Jan, a perfect arsenal of pistols and knives, was pacing up and down near by, talking with Millicent.

"Where are my arms?" roared Jules.

"Arms? Vy, dere dey pe, py your sides, hanging vrom your shoulters. Vere else vould dey pe?"

"Where is my rifle, you scoundrel?"

"Your rifle. Oh, vy didn't you ask vor it? I pees 'vraid he gets preak, so I puts him away."

"You have my pistols and knife in your belt; give them up directly."

"Mr. Demand," said Millicent, advancing, "we have decided to retain your arms until the return of Ben."

"In other words, you mean to keep me a sort of prisoner in this place?"

"Precisely."

"I will not endure it."

"You must; there is no other course open to you. Jan will not hesitate to shoot you if you attempt to go away. I am satisfied that you would throw obstacles in the way of Ben's rescue of Bentley. You must be quiet."

"I must, eh? The time will come when you shall regret this. I loved you dearly; I wanted to make you my wife. You scorned my love; you shall feel my hate."

"I fear you not."

"Look here, Shule: vas you vool enough to dalk love mit der young lady? I vill break you all in pieces. You's der vust vool I efer sees in all mine life. I dolls you as I dolls yoozt so. Oh, mein cracious, vat a vool you must be!"

The Frenchman looked as if he would like to commit murder if he had the weapons in his hands. But, fate was against him.

"You have every thing your own way now," he said; "let it pass; I will remain a prisoner."

"We are going this afternoon to the top of the hill to see if father Ben is in sight."

"I will remain here."

"No, you will accompany us; we do not propose that you shall have an opportunity to look for your arms, and turn the tables on us."

Jules ground his teeth, but there was nothing for him but obedience. Shaking his head, he went back into the cabin, while Jan looked after the traps which were near at hand, and took out the beaver which he found there. He did not go far away, however. Late in the afternoon they mounted the hill to look out upon the prairie. Jan forced his prisoner to go in front, and they reached the summit, where Miss Kent cast a sweeping glance over the broad plain. As she did so, she saw Bentley, mounted on the white horse of the trapper, pushing him forward at his best speed toward the little stream which ran through the prairie. The horse rose to the top with all his might and landed safely on the other side. Not far behind him came Ben Milin, at full speed, with two Indians close at his heels.

CHAPTER IX.

MIFFIN'S LEAP.

THE trapper had not been long in finding the Indians. They were merely a hunting party who had come out upon the plains for buffalo, and who had turned aside for the purpose of rooting out the men who had dared to invade their hunting-grounds. The arrow had been sent, the warning given, and there was nothing for them to do but to destroy the insolent intruders.

The trapper approached the Indian camp warily. It was pitched upon the wooded prairie, not far from one of those growths of timber which rise like oases in the desert, in the prairie country. Ben tied his horse in a thick clump a quarter of a mile away from the camp, and crept cautiously forward, like a horn scout as he was. Silent as death, not even stirring a leaf, his moccasined feet passed on, until the woods hid him from view. But for the fact that a high peak intervened between the hill on which Millie took her station to watch, and the ground upon which the camp stood, she might have seen the entire transaction.

The moment he had entered the woods he felt safer. Pressing forward to the extreme verge of the thicket, he climbed a tree, from which he had a view of the encampment. It was about noon, and the Indians were in great commotion. Nearly every warrior was gathered about Whirling Breeze, who was haranguing them in a loud voice. Some portions of the speech Ben could comprehend.

"Be not impatient, warriors of the Blackfeet. Have faith in the chief. These white men shall be given into our hands. There is a maiden among them fairer than snow; she shall dwell in the lodges of my people. Warriors and elders, it is well that some of the white men should come among us. They have many arts, of which we know nothing, by the power of which the Indians are falling away, as the snow melts when the sun is high. He shall teach us these things. When we know them, we can meet the white men with their

own weapons, and sweep them away. Let us wait the good time." Who the "he" here referred to, Ben could not for his life comprehend.

He looked about him for Bentley Morris. He was standing near the center of the camp, bound to a small tree. Ben began to despair. How was it possible, alone and unaided, to free him from the hands of the enemy?

Some time he sat in the tree. Indians passed and repassed. Several of them stood for a few minutes beneath the tree, and conversed in low tones. Ben was in doubt. Was it possible that Jules Damand had turned traitor? His heart sank at the thought that he had left Millicent under such a guard. No, impossible that Jules could play false. He had no motive for treachery—he could gain nothing, but would lose every thing, by desertion. So the honest old hunter dispensed of *that* suspicion.

There were several young squaws in the camp, as is generally the case with a hunting-party. Their not unmelodious voices could be heard calling to each other and singing snatches of Indian songs.

A greater tumult arose. Looking to the east, Ben was conscious that a dark mass was beginning to show itself upon the prairie, miles away. This dark mass was no strange sight to Ben Miffin. He had seen it a hundred times before on these limitless prairies. A herd of buffalo, driven forward by the scouts of the Indian band, who had been beating the prairie for game.

The greatest excitement immediately ensued in the Indian camp. Half the warriors vaulted upon their horses' backs without orders; the rest, more orderly, waited the movements of the chief. Whirling Breeze threw himself into the saddle and led the way at a gallop. Not a warrior remained in the camp, with the exception of the pair who guarded the prisoner. Even these ran out of the camp, and followed the herd with their eyes, burning to be among them. The women had gone out after the warriors as fast as they could run, leaving the camp deserted for a moment. This moment was not lost by Ben Miffin. Slipping from his perch, he ran to the tree, cut the bonds upon the arms of the prisoner, and they ran together to the shelter of the trees. If they had gained them

unseen, the escape might have been unnoticed for some time. But, an old woman, who had remained in the camp, caught sight of them as they ran, and raised a yell that might have done credit to a good-sized panther. This cry accelerated the fugitives' speed, and they reached the place where the white horse was tied.

"Git up," said Ben.

"What will you do?"

Miffin never answered a word, but, throwing his rifle to the "trail," ran off at a speed which awakened the admiration of the young man. As he hesitated, an arrow whizzed near his head. Looking back, he saw his late guards coming up at a run, while the man who had fired at him was fitting another shaft to the bow. Bentley leaped into the saddle, and followed Ben, who had by this time gained several hundred yards. He laughed as he saw the guards were after them. He had no fear of any thing they could do to him unless others came to their aid.

"Keep your hoss at a trot, boy. Not too fast; keep along side. You ain't got no weepens. Hyar's a pistol. 'Tain't a bad thing fer clust quarters, but blame 'em when ye hev to fire mor'n ten feet. They don't work; you take my word for it, they don't work. Them Injuns are good runners. The Lead one's the best. We've got to cross the stream. Kin ye do it?"

"The horse can swim it."

"Better jump it. Turn his head down-stream and go yer best now. Never mind me. I'm game enough to take keer of myself. You bet on that. Ride hard. 'Bout half-a-dozen rods below thar's a narrer place. I ain't got time to turn."

It was at this moment that Millicent arrived at the crest of the mountain and saw them on the plain. She saw that the only danger was to the brave old man, who had given up his horse to save his young friend. One of the savages had turned off in chase of Bentley. The other followed close on the heels of Ben, whirling his latchet in the air. Half a mile in the rear, coming up at the utmost speed of their fast horses, the girl saw at least a dozen savages, riding to the aid of the guards.

Ben was running directly for the little stream which meandered through the prairie. Millicent thought him doomed if his rifle was not loaded. Would he turn upon the bank of the stream and meet the Indians? The pace at which they were going was tremendous. The Indians knew him well, and those in the rear redoubled their efforts to come up with him. A wild yell of triumph broke from every throat as they saw him approach the stream. He comprehended his desperate situation now and had made up his mind as to his course. In times like these men do things which in their calmer moments seem impossible. He never slackened his speed as he approached the deep watercourse, and gathering all his powers for the effort, and grasping the rifle which had served him faithfully in many a bloody fray, he leaped into the air, and landed safe and sure upon the other bank! The place where he leaped was in the midst of a growth of prairie-timber, and by the side of a tree. As he turned, rifle in hand, his headmost pursuer, who had not been able to check his headlong speed, appeared upon the other bank, his countenance expressing the utmost surprise, as he gazed upon the wide space over which Ben had leaped. Throwing up his hands in astonishment, he shouted in the best English he could muster:

"*Good jump! Big Buffalo make very big jump!*"

"Yes, darn yer dirty face. Now *git* afore I bore a hole in ye! I don't keer to hurt ye, but ef ye ain't cut'n this afore I load this yer rifle, good-by."

The Indian saw his danger. The dreaded rifle was not yet loaded, and turning, he plied his heels in a way which did credit to his powers of locomotion. Millicent, from her station on the hill, could hardly refrain from laughing aloud as she saw the Indian run. Jan was in ecstasies. While Ben was on the other side of the stream he kept up a running fire of pitying phrases and encouraging words. When the trapper leaped the stream he performed a war-dance with great spirit upon the mountain top.

"Yoost look at dat, you Vrenchemans. Dat's mine vrent, Penn. See him shump! Shumps like a vrog, same vat you cats. Ach! Ho, ho, ha! See dat Injan run. Hehn? Trouble coom after you soon, Mister Injan. Oh, Shales, how

could you go so pad ash to darn against such a mans ash Penn?"

"Who said I turned against him? It is got up between you and this woman. I'll ask the old man when he comes in if I am to be insulted by every one and make no return. You old bully, I'll cut your heart out."

"You shut eep. I ain't a veed. Vat you likes der knife to me vor? Vat vor you dries to make love to der voman? Vat you vant mit a gun ven I let you go? No, Shakes, you pad egg."

"I'll let you know, for one, whether I am to be insulted or not. Ben will set it right. He wrongs no man."

"That is true," said Millicent. "Be content to let the matter rest. Or stay. They are now coming up the mountain and the Indians will not dare to follow them into the pass. They know that they are desperate men. If I promise to say nothing to them of your conduct, will you promise to refrain from the like in future?"

"The Dutchman would tell."

"Not if I ask him not," said Millicent, smiling on the German.

"No, py der saints! I ne'er says nothings, put I keep oop a good deal of t'inking all de dimes."

"Do you promise, Mr. Damand?"

"I must. I can't afford to have Ben against me."

"Then it is a bargain. See that you keep your part, Jan," said Millicent.

"Oh, I keeps my pargains," said Jan. "Off it's a pad one, I can nix help it. I makes pad pargains sometimes, ven I can not help him. Let us go down to Penn. I very sorry to keep any thing vrom Penn. He goot chap. You no dolls der young feller?"

Millicent flushed crimson. The acute German had found out that she loved Bentley Morris.

"Why should I tell him, Jan?"

"Vy? I don't know. Only ven you pe his vrow, piat pye, p'ey soon, den you dolls him of rythings. Yaw."

Jan chuckled hugely at her confusion, and walked behind the rest all the way down the mountain, that he might enjoy a laugh by himself. They came to the level plain just at the

point where the pass entered the valley, and there waited for the coming of the others. As they waited, they heard the crack of a rifle in the ravine below, followed by a shout from Ben.

"Run to their aid," cried Millicent. "Why do you hesitate?"

They hurried on to the assistance of the trapper, and found him standing in the mouth of the pass, rifle in hand, disputing the further advance of the party of Indians, who had by this time crossed the stream, and were parleying with him.

"My brother will let his red friends come. They wish to smoke a pipe with him," said the leading Indian.

"I am not in a smoking mood to-day," said Ben. "You clear out. I've made a camp hyar, an' hyar I mean to stay."

"My brother is welcome to the home of the Blackfoot. But, why has he come among us, and stolen our prisoners?"

"None of your pruisiness," roared Jan, taking a position by the side of Ben so suddenly, that even the iron-nerved trapper started. "Vat you vant here?"

"Ah-ha! Ar' you thar, old Bologna?" laughed the trapper. "I'm teachin' ye how to do it, then. Ha, Jules, you here too? Whar is the little 'un? Whar is she?"

"Here," said Millicent, in her clear, sweet voice, stepping to the front. "I could not keep away, while you were all in danger. And I brought Bentley his rifle. He needs a weapon."

Something in her manner as she gave the weapon into the owner's hand, told Jules that this Indian was her lover. He turned pallid as a corpse, and ground his teeth fiercely, but said not a word. That was useless now. He hoped that his day of triumph was not far off.

"Now, sons of the Blackfoot," said Ben, raising his voice, "ye kin see what kind of a chance ye've got agin' us, with them bows, arrows and spears. I reckon ye must ez well give it up."

The Indians drew together and held a conference. This over, they turned their horses' heads and galloped away to

the east. One by one the horses splashed through the river, and they were gone across the broad prairie, toward their camp.

"Penn," said Jan Schneider, extending his hand, "I'm glad you shumps dat rifer. I pees afrait you gone dere."

"So was I, Jan, when I see how wide it was. Let's go an' measure it. I'm proud of that jump."

They went back to the stream and measured the distance, and found it to be just twenty-three feet. And the river was nearly as deep.

"Swanzey-dree feet!" roared Jan. "Dere! Some of you peat dat!"

"I can't," said Bentley. "What did that Indian say when you jumped? I heard him roar something after you."

"He said, 'Good jump; Big Buffalo'—that's me—'make very big jump,'" said Ben. "By thunder, he made me laugh so I couldn't have shot at him. An' didn't he light out when I begun to load?"

"'Twas a great jump," said Bentley. "You ought to be proud of it. What shall we do now?"

"Better git back to camp. I don't allow no Injun to drive me out until I git ready."

The party went back over the rocky way, and Damand saw, with silent rage, that it was upon the arm of Bentley the maid leaned, and his words which pleased her most. But he waited his time, satisfied that his turn must come. They set to work and collected the scattered articles, which in the late trouble had got into confusion. The traps were in a bad way, and many of them needed resetting. The four men went the rounds that day and got every thing in order, and brought in a number of fine skins.

"These are valuable skins," said Bentley. "I have been in the fur trade myself, and I never saw better beaver."

"They ain't been thinned out much," replied Ben. "All the old uns ar' hyar yit. It makes a big difference."

"I know it does. What a pity we must be driven away so soon."

"Ef it wa'n't for the gal, we'd stay hyar and brass it out. Bat, while we've got weak 'uns like that with us it makes a man cowardly. So we must git back ez soon ez we kin. Onc't she is safe to the forts, I'm comin' back, fer one."

"I would not, if I were you," said Jules. "It is dangerous."

"Who keers for a little danger? Any man kin git into danger ef he wants to. It's the spice of life, danger is. Go out fer that trap, Jules, I'm a little stiff after my run. I ain't ez strong ez I used to be."

"You can run faster than any man in the party now," said Bentley. "And who among us is able to jump twenty-three feet?"

"The old man ain't dead yit," replied Ben, grinning. "He'll do a power of work afore he goes under. Yes, he will; you bet on it. An' as for the durned Injuns, they may drive us away now, but we'll come back. And to-morrow we've got to build a raft. 'Twon't do to be taken un-awares. Hurry up!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SUCK.

THE river upon which these scenes are laid, was a narrow stream, sometimes flowing smoothly over a sandy bottom, and at others leaping downward with all the force of a mountain-torrent. The water, dropping over a beaver dam, fell upon a sloping bed and rushed downward with impetuous fury. The currents drew together in the center after leaving the falls, forming what is known in the Far West as a "Suck." The current was full of rocks at this point, against which the water rushed in ungovernable rage, with a strength hardly to be resisted. On the morning succeeding the escape of Ben and young Morris, they began to build a raft.

The events of the past few days satisfied Ben that they might be attacked at any time, and he wished to provide a way of escape. Just at the foot of the waterfall was a growth of light pine suitable for his purpose. Calling on the others for assistance, all set to work upon the float. The logs were slightly squared, and bound together with tough green willows after a manner much in vogue among the trappers. It was

the work of half a day, and as they had little else to do, they gave much care to it. The raft finally was finished and floated down to the shore by a rapid. But the men were not without some pride.

"Did anybody ever go down the river here, trapper?" asked Millicent.

"Not often, little gal," said Ben. "It's an awful place to be in a skid, an' we won't do it unless we're driv' so close we can't help it. It's best to be prepared afores. Leastways I think so."

"Will that raft hold us all?" asked Millicent.

"You git on't, Jan, an' try."

Jan stepped carefully on the float. Ben stood close to the shore, watching the effect of his weight upon the structure. Jules stood just behind the trapper. Millicent was nearer the river. Bentley had gone into the hut for something they needed.

"Jump up an' down on it," said Ben.

Jan did as he was requested. The next moment there was a loud crack, as of a lawser parting under a heavy strain, and the craft was whirling down the current, out of reach of the men on the shore. Ben darted into the water and made an ineffectual attempt to grasp it, but it was already beyond the utmost stretch of his arm. To their horror they saw their comrade drifting hopelessly down the stream. They looked downward; as far as the eye could reach, the river was hopelessly churned into foam, and gray rocks reared their heads above the water, threatening death to any unfortunate wretch thrown upon them. The bluffs stood out bold and high on either side, and buried the river in from mortal view. In every eddy by the side of these bluffs, the cunning beavers had made their lodges, so that they were safe from their inveterate enemies, the trappers. The Dutchman saw nothing of this; he only saw the foaming river, the brown ledges, and the ragged rocks.

From the spot where the raft started, the eddy swept him directly across the stream in the direction of a serrated ledge, which threatened instant destruction. Seated on the narrow craft, grasping it with both hands and ever looking toward the other shore, the unfortunate man set up a cry for help which

pierced brave old Ben to the very heart. He began to throw off his hunting-shirt. Just as he stood, half naked, on the bank, the raft struck the ledge against which it was drifting. Such was the momentum which it had acquired, that it sent Jan flying from the logs, striking the water many feet away.

"Alas, alas!" cried Millicent, "he is gone!"

"Not yit," said Ben; "I'm hyar."

The current swept Jan farther down, and he struck the rocks again; but this time he grasped a jutting ledge, found a place for his feet, and shouted for help at the top of his voice.

"I'm comin', ole chap," responded Ben in return. "Look out! Foller me, Jule."

He plunged into the stream, while Jules remained standing on the bank. The trapper sunk from view in a moment. Taking advantage of the undertow, he swam toward the other shore. He had learned from the Indians the trick of swimming under water, and did it well. For a few moments nothing was heard but the splash of the water and the shouts of poor Jan, who imagined himself forsaken in the bleak world. All at once he beheld the water separate close by his side, and from the swift current Ben Miffin sprang into view, dashing the water from his eyes with one hand as he laid the other on the rocks to keep himself from floating downward.

"How ar' ye?" he said, coolly. "Rayther a cold berth, this."

"Ve never gets out of dis no more, Penn," said Jan, despairingly. "I pees very mooch 'vraid ve gone dis dimes. Vy den you pring me to dis miser'ble coonthry?"

"It's good enough fer the natyves," said Ben. "Shet up yer meat-trap. Let *me* do the talkin'; I'll hev enough of it, I reckon."

"Dalking's no use," replied the poor fellow. "Vat I wants ish to be sure I can get out from dis. An' dis ish vat I dinks: ve vill never get out from dis no more vile ve lifs, so help me ash I believe dis ish drue. Dere ish no more hope ver poor Jan Schneider. He ish deat unt drowned mit vasser. Ah! Mein Gott! Phew!"

"Jest you open yer mouth ag'in, an' I'll give ye a smash right squar' in the meat-trap. Now mind what I tell ye: I

ain't goin' to hev two head bosses in this yer business—yor bet I ain't. Now listen to me, an' hold yer row. Kin ye swim?"

"Like a hoondred pounds off iron," said Jan. "Gootness cracious!"

"That's bad. I never did see a Dutchman thet knowed any thing. Ye durned anatomy! Well, ef I let ye git on my shoulders, wil' ye promise not to ketch me round the neck?"

"Yaw: I bromise anyt'ings, so ash I does not pe drowned mit vasser."

"Very good. Then when I give ye the word, lay yer hands on my shoul ders an' kick out with both feet. Kin ye do it?"

"I kicks like ter duyvel."

Ben loosened his hold on the rock, and let himself float down to the speaker. When all was ready, Jan laid his brawny hands upon the shoulders of the trapper, and he pushed out from the shelving bank. Jan immediately began to flourish his heels like the paddles of an ocean steamer, leaving a broad trail of foam behind him. Indeed, so vehement were his efforts, that he buried the head of the swimmer under the water, and Ben was compelled to call on him to desist. But when he fell a dead weight upon the shoulders of the trapper, the drag became fearful even for his iron strength to sustain.

They were by this time in the midst of the powerful current, where the "suck" formed a vortex so strong that when within twenty feet of the shore it seized them and hurried them away from the safety so nearly gained. In vain the trapper struggled against it and called to Jules for help. But the Frenchman seemed to have lost all control of himself. Instead of following the trapper he remained on the bank, running wildly up and down, making no effort to assist either of them. But Bentley was coming down from the hut at full speed. "Help! help!" cried Ben, in a sinking voice. He had got out of the suck by this time, but faced it again bravely. The current had been gradually sweeping them downward. They reached a place where a pine had fallen to the ground and was lying in the water. Ben, striking in desperately, felt the sunken branches strike his

"Kick, Jan, kick!" he shouted, with all the power of his lungs. "Kick fer yer life."

Jan fished out desperately, and though the head and shoulders of the trapper were buried by the effort, he managed to grasp the limb of the fallen tree.

"Easy, Jan; keep cool," he said.

Jan ceased plunging, and Ben slowly hauled away on the slender limb, going up it hand over hand, as sailors do. If it should break! He looked below and saw the jagged rocks and the high walls of stone on both sides of the cañon. To drift lower down was certain death.

He felt the limb bend in his grasp, but it held firmly, and at last he laid his strong hand on a stouter one. As he did so, he allowed the shout of joy which had been pent up in his breast so long to escape in an exultant cry. Jan took it up and made the rocks fairly ring.

It was easy work now. In a moment more their feet trod the unyielding soil of the bottom of the stream, and they clambered to the shore. Ben ran to the place where his clothes lay, and got into them without delay.

"There! I feel better," he said, as the last garment was donned. "I kain't say I like the other style of costume in the winter. 'Tain't voluminous enough. Fer summer, now, a light an' airy rig like thet ar' would be jest the thing; but it won't do fer the Black Hills; ob no."

"I dinks ye petter haf a vine," said Jan, with rattling teeth. "It ish very cold here."

"Yer mighty right," rejoined Ben. "Say, Jules, kain't ye do thet much fer us?"

Jules walked away slowly and began to gather the materials for a fire; but he walked lazily, and Jan turned in to help him, dripping as he was. Ben looked at the Frenchman in considerable astonishment. A change seemed to have come over him since his capture by the Indian band. His eye had a sullen light; his looks were downcast, and his whole appearance that of a man who was wholly actuated by some bad passion.

"Bowed ef I kin make out what's the matter with Jules," muttered Ben. "He's got trouble on his mind, some how."

"Come here, father Ben," said Millicent at this moment. "I have something to show you."

He turned, and walked to the place where she stood, near where the raft had been lying. The broken withe by which it had been tied still hung to the trunk of the pine. Millicent lifted this and showed it to him.

"Do you see nothing strange in this?" she said. A glance at it was sufficient to show that it had not been broken in any ordinary way. It was *cut* clean through by some sharp instrument. He looked about him. Jules was still lazily working at the fire.

"Mebbe thar's somethin' on the tree or the rocks that did it," he whispered.

"If there is we can find it," said Millicent; "you had better try."

He searched the trunk of the tree and the rocks near at hand, to find any thing which could by any possibility have cut the rope. He looked in vain. The trunk was wonderfully smooth and the rocks out of reach. There was but one supposition then. Some one had cut the withe.

"Ye don't mean to tell me that Jules c'u'd hev the heart to do that?" said Ben.

"I do not like to suspect anybody, but I believe from my heart that it was he. I have good reason to fear him, and so have you."

Ben turned toward the Frenchman. He had at last collected material for a fire, and Jan had kindled them into a blaze, over which he was crouching, while Jules stood watch him with a sullen and dissatisfied air.

"Come here, Jules," said Ben. "I have something to tell ye."

Jules looked as if he would like to refuse.

"What do you want?" he said, moving slowly and sullenly toward the trapper.

Millicent had left the old man, and was talking with Bentley by the river side.

"Come hyar," repeated Ben, in an authoritative tone of voice.

Jules prised irresolutely and looked the speaker over from head to foot.

"Come hyar, I say," repeated Ben. "Hev a man got to w'ar his tongue out a-tellin' of ye to move?"

Jules followed him reluctantly aside, and they stood together near the wall of the hut, not far from Jan, who was intently engaged in drying his clothing. The Frenchman did not like the expression of the old trapper's face. It showed a determination to understand the matter.

"Ye hang back like a twelve-year-old gal, ye do," said the old trapper. "What's the matter with ye, anyhow? I want ter ask ye a question or two. I asked ye to feller me when Jan got adrift. Why didn't ye?"

"Where would you have been if the tree-top had not lain in the water? Battered to pieces on the rocks below the fall. I wasn't going to try it, you'd better believe. I warned you to come back."

"That's all right," said Ben. "I ain't hard-hearted enough to force a man to do any thing he's *afraid* of. But look yer. Do you see this withe? Who cut it?"

He held up to view the severed strand, showing where it had been cut. So sudden was the question, and so unexpected, that the Frenchman stammered and turned deadly pale. There could be no doubt as to his guilt.

"I never touched—"

"Take keer! Don't lie to me! I ask ye as a friend to keep a straight tongue. I expect ye to try it on, but it's no use. So don't lie. Don't I know ye? Didn't ye stand behind me when ye cut the withe? Wasn't it cut through and through? I ain't quite a fool, nuther be you. So shut up. You cut it yerself, jist to git rid of the Dutchman; I s'pose, because of yer old grudge ag'in' him."

Jules covered his confusion by a laugh. He thought best to turn it off in that way.

"Well, Ben, I did cut the withe; but it was a joke, jist to give that Dutchman a big scare. I had no idea the raft would get away."

"A joke. I can pooty nigh makin' it the dearest jest you ever hearn of."

"You don't suppose I meant any thing in earnest," said Jules, cringingly.

"It don't matter so much what I think," said Ben. "I believe Jan has a v'ice in the matter, an' I reckon he'd say if it wa'n't in earnest it was the roughest joke on him ever

hern of. Anyhow, I've got my opinion, and I'll back it for ten mills, U. S. currency, that he licks you out of your boots when he hears about this nice little joke. Ef he don't lick ye, he's a fool."

"He dare not lay the weight of a finger upon me in anger," said Jules, fiercely. "He has done it more than once. Let him beware of the next time."

"I've had a hint before to-day thet all ain't right. I begin to suspect ye greivous. I won't say anything about that now. About Jan first; he ain't a bit afraid of you, Jan ain't. Now let me give you a piece of advice. I don't want to hev any words with you. Jest let the Dutchman alone. He's clumsy, mebbe, but he's got the makin' of a man in him, and he's good-hearted, an' I won't hev him abused. Thet's about the way the thing stands now, nigh as I kin git at it."

"You seem to have taken to him all at once," muttered Jules.

"He's honest; thet's one reason; I like honesty in any one. An' I give ye fir' warnin', next time ye dar' to do a mean thing to him, I'll walk into ye like chalk. D'ye h'ar what I say? Understand me, too. I won't hev no man in my company that won't give the others a fair show. And ye've been hard on thet poor feller ever sense he cum hyar with us. Now stop it."

"Is it any thing to you?"

"Ye bet it is. Ef it ain't I'll make it so mind thet."

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUICKSAND.

THEY set to work at once and built another raft. After it was done, Jules mounted and rode away to the east. At any other time, Ben would have questioned him with regard to his absence. But Millicent gave him a sign which he understood, and he let him go without a word. The moment he was gone she came to the old trapper and revealed to him enough to excite Ben's anger and scorn of the treacherous rascal.

"Don't say a word to him. I gave my promise to remain silent about it while he remained quiet. He has broken his pledge, but do not let him know that we suspect him."

"The gal is right," said Ben. "Don't let him know. But we kin watch the devil clust; an' when he gives us a chaine, down with him."

"You will do nothing rashly, I hope. Remember, much depends on that."

"I can't keep my hands off him," responded Bentley.

They had just prepared dinner when Jules returned, coming, not up the river, but out of the pass to the east.

Ben looked at his face as he came in and saw that it was moody. He said nothing, but made a place for him at the fire so that he might have the benefit of the warmth. Jules did not immediately take advantage of this, but busied himself in removing the blanket from his horse, and turning him loose. When this was done, he came slowly toward the fire and sat down.

"Whar have ye been?" asked Ben.

"Up the east pass. I thought, this morning, that I sighted a moose-herd, and I've been out scouting round, thinking I might possibly find some of the critters. I struck their tracks at the bottom of the second cañon, and not long after came upon the herd. There was only three of them in all, and pretty well south they have got, too. But if we can kill one, it will give us good fodder for a week to come."

"Moose down hyar? That's mighty uncommon, I tell ye. Their grounds is at least five hundred miles to the north of this. I'd like to go with ye, but I don't think I kin, I've got so mach to do. S'pose ye go out with Jan? Maybe ye'd git one of them."

"All right," said Jules, eagerly. "What do you say, Jan? Will you go?"

"I coos mit you," said Jan. "I likes to shoot von vat you call him—moose."

They started out directly after eating their dinner, leaving the rest at the camp. Jan carried the tremendous weapon which already had done such fearful execution. Jules had his rifle. They kept their horses until they had reached the mouth of the pass down which Jan, Ben and Millicent had

turned to get upon the mountain, on the day when the Indians came to the camp. Here they picketed the animals and went forward on foot, with great caution. As they emerged from the pines they had a view of the small valley. It was like their own camp, nearly circular in form, with the river in front and the mountains on the other three sides. There might have been sixty acres of flat land in the valley, and on the other side, close down to the water's edge, three moose were feeding. Along the western base of the mountains ran a long strip of timber, and into this the trappers at once plunged, keeping the wind in their faces, for the keen-scented animals would have detected them in a moment if they had come up on the other side. The distance from the woods to the game was not more than a hundred yards, and Jules prepared to fire. As he dropped on one knee and laid his rifle across a low limb, the leading moose raised his stately head and looked about him, as if scenting danger. Jan had followed the example of the Frenchman, and his rifle was lying across a branch, pointed at the second of the two animals. As the moose looked up, both pieces exploded. To the utter surprise of Jules, the one he fired at bounded away unhurt, while Jan's dropped upon the ground, staining it with his flowing life-blood. Jan ran hastily toward the wounded beast while Jules watched him with a malevolent eye. He knew the danger into which the honest Dutchman ran in approaching a wounded moose, but did not warn him. A hundred feet from the body of the game Jan's feet suddenly sunk beneath him, and he felt as if an iron hand had seized his ankles and held him down.

"Coom here, Saries," he shouted. "I pe got in der mut. Coom here unt help me out!"

Jules walked slowly to the end of the quagmire, about ten feet from the imprisoned Dutchman. All the evil in the man's heart showed itself at that moment. All that was bad, and that was cruel, imprinted deep lines on his face, which gleamed savagely in the sun-rays.

"You are in trouble, in ad Jan?" he said, coolly.

"Help me out!" cried Jan.

"Keep quiet," said Jules. "Do you remember the day out yonder on the prairie, when you threw me down and planted

your elephant foot upon my breast? Ah, I see you have not forgotten. You remember it with pleasure. I have not forgotten it either, and I swore, sooner or later, to have my revenge. You aided that girl against me, and for that I'll be doubly revenged."

"I'm sinkin' deeper all de times!" cried Jan. "Coom, Shules, be a goot veller unt help me out. Vat's de use of roolin'! I ouch your heat ven I does get out, off ye leave me here any more."

"Perhaps you don't know where you are?" said Jules. "Then I will tell you. There are places in these hills which we call quicksands. A man falls into one and from that moment, unless help is near, he is doomed. Even his struggles tell against him. Deeper and deeper he sinks in the slimy sand. The iron hands upon his ankles drag him down every moment. He sinks to his knees in the slime. He throws himself down. That is useless and will hasten his death. He struggles up again. He sinks to his thighs."

"Mein Gott!" moaned Jan.

"You begin to comprehend. You see now what my revenge will be. You have sunk to your knees. The efforts you make to pull up one leg sink the other deeper. Your ponderous weight sinks you very fast. By-and-by you will be up to your neck; then your mouth will be covered; and when you begin to choke, I will sit by and laugh."

Jan was sinking slowly, his face turned toward his executioner, who sat grimly down by the side of the quicksand, and waited for the end. The Dutchman made no effort to break down his stubborn resolve. A single glance at his set face was enough to show that all entreaties would be useless. In that hour when the true spirit of man comes to the surface, it was plain that Jan's fears were rather the result of a life fraught with little danger, than cowardice; and if he failed to look danger bravely in the face at first, it was because it came to him in a new form. But now, his face was steady, and though his lips moved, it was in saying the prayers he had heard in fatherland, and which he had learned at his old mother's knee. The cold quicksand had risen above his thighs, and yet Jan seemed unmoved. Such calmness overpowered his enemy. He had expected to hear the Dutchman

cry aloud for mercy; to beg him to help him; to humble himself for pity; but Jan did not think of that. His face was pale, but there was a kind of smile upon it.

"Cry for mercy!" shouted Jules, tauntingly. "Beg for your life!"

"No, Shtabs; off you have any pity in your heart, unt care enough for me to forget vat I did, unt save me, I would be glad. But I don't ask any things from you."

"You will die like a dog."

"Never," replied Jan. "Like a man whose father died in battle vor te sake of his dear fatherland. Sit py unt see me tie. It vill be a *man's* deat!"

Jules assailed him with a storm of vituperation, to which Jan made no answer.

At this moment there came a great shout of surprise and anger, and they saw Ben Miffin running toward them at full speed with a hatchet in his hand. Jules caught up his rifle and began to load it hastily, but Ben was too quick for him, and he clabbed the weapon and stood upon his guard. But his defense was vain against the wiry old trapper, who broke down his guard and prostrated him by a blow on the head. Before a minute had passed, his arms were buckled behind him by means of a belt, and his legs served in the same way.

"Quick, Penn, quick!" shouted Jan.

"Keep cool, my boy! I'll save ye yit," cried Ben. "Keep yer arms clear of the mud."

He whistled for his horse, which he had tied in the pass. A loud neigh answered him, and directly they heard the sound of hoofs. Diamond had broken his lariat and was coming at full speed. Catching sight of his master, he bounded to his side. Ben took the broken lariat from the saddle-bow and formed a slip-noose, which he threw to Jan.

"Put that under yer arms an' draw it taut," said Ben.

Jan obeyed. By this time Jules had recovered from the effects of the blow, and lay watching their movements anxiously. When the noose was under Jan's arms, Ben instructed him how to pass a stick through it, so that it would not draw too tightly around his body. The loose end of the lariat he fastened to the saddle-bow. The horse stood quietly

waiting, as if he comprehended fully what was expected of him.

"Be ready, Jan, said the trapper, an' if the strain is too much, sing out. Now then, Diamond, pull!"

The horse did not jerk, but pulled steadily. Jan set his teeth, for the strain was fearful. For a moment he was stationary, then he felt his body rise a little from the clinging sand.

"That started ye," said Ben, joyfully. "Whee, Diamond. Can ye stand it?"

"Yaw, yaw, pull away," cried Jan, in an eager tone. "I shtands any t'ings so dat I gits out vrom dis place."

"Pull, Diamond," said Ben.

The horse drew away on the lariat, and to the intense joy of both, the body of the Dutchman was pulled high up on the hard ground. For a moment Jan lay pulling, and the next he sprung up and grasped the trapper by both hands.

"Tank you, Penn. I don't say much, but I drinks a great deal. I nefer forgets vile I lifts."

"Pshaw," said Ben. "Thank the hees; he did the work."

The intelligent animal turned his head to look at them, as if conscious that they were talking of him, and bent forward that he might receive the caresses which Jan showered upon him. For awhile they thought nothing of the man who lay at their feet, until Jan's eye fell upon him as he lay there, his black eyes twinkling with rage and apprehension.

"Dere he lies, dat villains!" said Jan. "He gits me in der mut, unt den he von't help me out."

"I was jubous he'd do something of the kind," said Penn. "I wa'n't far away. That's what I let him go with ye fur, jest to try him. I'm sorry I did it now. Ain't he a sweet specimen for a human?"

He stooped and loosened the strap on the legs of the Frenchman.

"Git up!" he said.

Jules Damand rose slowly, with his eyes continually fixed upon the earth.

"Nice kind of man, ain't ye?" said Ben. "What ye got to say fer yerself?"

"Nothing," replied Jules.

"Nothing?"

"Not a word. Do with me as you choose. If you had still waited a minutes longer, the work would have been complete."

"Ye could ha' let I see 'n' I'd! I'm sorry I ever broke bread with the like of ye. A mean-spirited skunk! I'd save ye right ef I sent a bullet through yer skull. Wouldn't I now?"

"Do it, then."

"I leave it with Jan. Ef he says kill ye, why, yer no bet-
then a dead man. Ye owe yer life to him, an' ef he choses
to take it, that's no law among free trappers to save ye. Any-
way, I won't help ye. Jan!"

"Vell?"

"Here's a pistol. It's loaded with a ball. This skunk
ain't fit to live. Trapper law will bar ye out in shootin' him
through the head. He is in yer hands."

Jan took the pistol, cocked it, and placed it close to the
head of the Frenchman. A deathlike stillness reigned in the
place. The face of Jules was utterly colorless, but he did
not speak a word. He knew that his life was forfeited by the
sweep of the trappers, and that nothing could save him,
if the man whose life he had placed in such deadly peril
chose to claim that forfeit. But his proud spirit would not
permit him to speak a word. He looked straight into the
muzzle of the threatening weapon, his lips white as ashes.

"Fire!" he whispered at length.

Jan dropped his hand.

"Remember that this is the second time he has nearly
killed ye," said Ben. "He cut the raft loose the other day."

"Vat?" cried Jan.

"Yes," replied Danand. "I did that. Fire away."

Again Jan raised the weapon and again that deathlike
stillness reigned upon the scene. But Jan could not do it. Such
a deed was not in his nature. He uncocked the weapon and
looked back to Ben.

"I can't do it," he said. "He nearly kills me, deux, swi
dames, but I never kills a man mit his hands tied. Let him
go."

"Walk before us," said Ben, sternly. "Don't try to escape."

Jules obeyed silently, although glad of any respite.

"Holt on," said Jan. "Dere is a my mose vat I kills."

"We ain't got time to 'tendi to him now. Lead my hoss."

I want to watch this beauty."

They went back to the horses. Jules was put upon his own and his feet bound with a lariat. Jan rode in front. Ben brought up the rear, with his pistol ready, in case the fellow tried to get away. He made no such attempt. In this order they reached the camp. Here Ben tied the horse of the Frenchman to a tree and opened the cache. The beaver skins they had taken were bound up in bundles of twenty each. Ben laid them out in three equal piles. When this was done he untied Jules and made him dismount. Millicent and Bentley looked on in silence.

"Ar' them divided *fa'r*?" said Ben.

"Yes," said Jules.

"Then take either pile ye like and *git*."

"I don't want them," said Jules. "Give me my horse and gun and let me go."

"Do just ez ye chose. Thar they ar'. Ef ye don't want 'em, it's all right. We kin find a use for 'em."

"I won't take the skins."

"All right. Thar's yer hoss an' thar's yer gun. Take them an' *git*, and mind, ef ye turn up against us yer a dead man. I lets ye go now because none here wants yer life or yer company, but yer a dead man ef ye ever crosses my track. I have spoken—so be off with you!"

Jules obeyed. Without a word he rode away and the hills soon hid him from their sight.

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH THE SNARE

THE three men began to complete their raft, working with all their power. In a few hours the work was done, and they were ready to go down the river at a moment's warning. Then Ben set to work upon another cache for his skins.

which it would be impossible to take with him. He chose a place within the cañon through which the river ran, and here he laid the skins. His brow was sad. The old man had been deceived in regard to a comrade, and he was grieved.

"Do not grieve for a bad man," said the girl, observing his sadness. "He is not worth a single pang."

"True enough, gal. An' yit, I thought the lad a true one. I did indeed. But, let him go; the time will come when he'll be sorry in his heart for what he's done."

When all was ready, they pushed the raft down to the very mouth of the cañon and there embarked. The horses were attached. Ben took his station in front of the raft. Bentley and Jan took the sides, each armed with a long pole. Millicent crouched in the center, beside the pile of provisions which the forethought of the trapper had induced him to bring.

A perilous path lay before them. The stream ran dark and swift between huge bowlders of gray rock, rearing their heads in the air. Without the skill of Trapper Ben their lives were not worth a moment's purchase. At first they were in the power of the "suck," which drew them rapidly toward the other bank, and threatened to dash them on the place where the other raft was beaten to pieces. But the quick eye of Ben saw the peril and averted it. As the raft dashed down upon the wall a skillful push of the long pole sent it whirling down the stream, while the other men stood aghast, and Millicent also covered her face with her hands.

When she looked up, the present peril was over and they were dashing down the dark channel at a breakneck speed. There was a wild, triumphant look in the eyes of the old hunter, as he guided the raft on its course.

"Hurray, boys; now we ar' goin'," he shouted. "Don't look back, lads. I'll take ye safe through, or bust things a-splashing. Darn a Frenchman. Does he think he kin over-rough me? Hey! look out for that rock, Bentley. That's right. You'd make a good rafterman in time. Look sharp, Jan. There's a rock loomin' up on your side. Give it a sly tap. That's it. Well done. Ef we onc't git on the level, it

will be all right. I've got an idee. Stand steady, boys. The wust time is comin'. You kain't help me much. Bentley, go astern and when that brown rock is just ahead of us, sock that pole ag'inst it, and push ez hard ez you kin. Now mind you do it."

"Ay, ay," said Bentley, going to the stern. "Give me the word."

They were now approaching a place where a fall in the bed of the stream made a rapid, in which the water was churned into dazzling foam—a terrible sight to the eyes of those not accustomed to the terrors of the western plains. Naturally brave, Millicent could not help a shudder as she saw the danger upon which they were rushing headlong. But a glance at that old man standing upright in the bow of the raft, stern and calm, grimly confident in himself, restored her courage.

Down into that wild waste of wreathing foam rushed the raft. A rock was on the right hand, one on the left, and she seemed rushing directly upon destruction in front. But, all at once, the head of the raft swung round, and showed clear water in front, perhaps ten feet in width, into which they rushed. The spray flew high overhead and for a moment blinded them. The next moment they passed out of their danger, and lay rising and falling in the more tranquil water just above another beaver-dam, in the midst of the cañon.

"Aha," said Ben. "Hyar we be. I'll trouble Injuns to nose us out hyar. They'll git round lively ef they do."

The raft floated on, and struck against the little dam. Using his pole, Ben pushed it along close to the edge of the dam and gained the shore, where he helped Millicent from the raft, and secured it.

"Dat ish goot," said Jan. "More ash-peter ash goot. I regret Blackfeet nefer finds us here. Vost't say so, too?" And the Dutchman laughed loudly. "Vat you do then, Peter?"

"Do? I'm going far help. I kin get it. I seen some signs when I were out on the prairie with you, Bentley, and I think an old friend of mine, Father O'Connell, they call him, lives on the plains. Ef I kin find him, I'll make ye safe, ef ye dar to stay."

"I am willing," said Millicent.

"And I," said Bentley.

"I'd rather go mit Penn, put if he say shtay here, I does it," cried Jan.

"Then I say stay hyar. They may need ye. Ef the wust comes, push out yer raft an' make fer the plains. Ye mont git off that way. Ef so be I'm above ground, I won't be two days gone. I've left ye meat enough to last a week, ef ye don't go too heavy on it. Good-by, gal. Ef I don't come back and ye git away, remember the old man sometimes, won't ye?"

Millicent threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him as she might have kissed her father. The face of the old man worked for a moment, and then the undaunted one was sniveling.

"Thar, git away. Ye've made a baby of me at last. I knew ye would. Now let me go. Good-by, boys. Whatever happens, take keer of the little gal. Be sure of that."

He sprang upon the dam and crossed to the other side. They saw him clamber up the distant side of the mountain, and turn to wave his hand in token of farewell. Then he passed over the crest and was lost to sight.

A strange feeling fell upon them then. A feeling of loneliness, a sense of insecurity, and all felt how much they had learned to love and trust Trapper Ben. Jan felt his loss most of all, and went aside, where he cast himself down on the ground and put his arm before his eyes.

The others did not dare to stay the title of the honest Dutchman's sorrow, and a half-hour passed in unbroken silence, when suddenly Millicent cried:

"Look there, look there!"

Above them, on a ledge of rocks, stood the strange creature which had haunted them since their entrance into the life. Jan ran to his gun, but Bentley seized him and would not let him fire. But, at the sight of the gun, the monster sprang away, and hid himself behind a rock, from which he looked out at them, cowering back when the gun was pointed at him.

"Don't you dare to fire," said Bentley. "You do not know what danger you may bring down upon us by the act."

Jan yielded reluctantly, and laid aside the gun. The moment he did so the creature, with its fierce laugh, sprang up the cliff and disappeared.

"Thank heaven he is gone," said Millicent. "That monster gives me more uneasiness than the Indians and Jules Damand to boot. Something within tells me that the villain will yet give us trouble. Oh, if he should get me, by any means, in his power!" And she visibly shuddered.

"One of us must stand guard," said Bentley. "We have more dangers than this to fear."

"So you have," yelled a voice on the cliff above. "Beware!"

They looked up, long enough to see the malicious face of Jules Damand looking down upon them. It was only a passing glimpse, for he disappeared immediately.

"Just as I feared," said Millicent with a sigh. "That villain will not let us rest."

"He knew that we would take to the river, and followed along the crest until he saw us land. There goes his rifle; he is firing at something."

The report of the rifle was followed by the cry of the Mountain Devil. Then they heard the sound of feet upon the ledge above, and shortly after Jules Damand appeared upon the ridge, closely pursued by the wild thing. The Frenchman had a knife in his hand, and as he reached the level rock overlooking the stream, and saw that he could run no farther, he turned at bay, and was ready to fight for his life. The Mountain Devil held in his hand the barrel of the rifle which he had wrenched from the hand of Jules, and the stock of which he had shattered on the rocks.

"Shall we help him, Jan?"

"Yaw," said Jan. "Den we tie him up."

They began to climb up the rocks, while Millicent stood, with bated breath, watching the combat on the ledge. The monster was raining a storm of blows upon the head of the Frenchman; but he had closed and grasped it by the shaggy hair upon its breast, so that the blows were not at the full sweep of the arm. Already the keen knife had been plunged thrice to the hilt in the body of the monster, when it threw down the rifle barrel, and caught Jules Damand in its long arms

Millicent uttered a scream which rang through the hills, for she saw that the man was doomed. The monster had got his death-wound, but still the strength he possessed was too much for Jules Damand, even though fighting with the energy of despair. He saw the heads of Bentley and Jan appear above the ledge, and knew that they would be too late, for the monster had forced him back to the extreme edge of the chasm, two hundred feet above the torrent below.

As the feet of Bentley reached the rock he caught a glimpse of the agonized face of Damand, whose paleness was terrible. He gasped for breath and made one struggle. It was his last; for the next moment, with a demoniac laugh, the huge body of the Mountain Devil shot out into the air, bearing in its arms the form of Damand. Millicent saw them strike the water, and ran to the spot. A crimson stain told where they had gone down, and a white head and arm could be seen struggling faintly in the flood. She seized it, and with a strength which was unnatural dragged Jules Damand out of the water. He had only time to gasp out a prayer for forgiveness, and die.

They buried him that day under the shadow of the ledge. The body of the Mountain Devil was also raised, and they hid it on the shore. Then they saw that it was in the form of a man of gigantic size, whose uncouth aspect might have been gained by companionship with beasts. They buried him too, and waited for Ben.

He came back next day, triumphant, but would tell them nothing. "Come along," he said, and they followed with implicit faith up the ledge. The day was nearly spent when they reached their old camp, but Ben caught the horses and made his companions mount. Jules had left his horse, which Ben had found its way back to the camp. Bentley took it. Ben gave up his own good horse to Millicent, and walked by its side. They reached the mouth of the pass, and Ben called them to a halt, and pointed out upon the prairie. There they saw the band of Wandering Breeze encamped, apparently in the greatest security.

"Load yer weapons, boys," said Ben. "Leave the gal byar. I'm goin' to fire my rifle. When I do, watch the spur of the mountain yonder, an' then follow me."

They obeyed him. Ben raised his rifle and fired in the air. Occident to the south, two hundred warriors, armed to the teeth, emerged from their covert and charged the astonished Black-elt. Ben sprang into his saddle and rode forward to aid his friends. He came too late. The band of Whirling Breeze was scattered, and he only escaped by the speed of his horse. Ben arrived in time to congratulate two fine mustangs, and compliment the Crow chief upon the readiness and dispatch of the action.

The party proposed to return to the forts. The chief and fifty chosen warriors rode with them. Among the prisoners Ben found the son of Whirling Breeze, and asked the chief for him. The request was granted, and the young warrior was set at liberty and returned to his friends.

"Chief," said Ben, when he had heard the story of the death of the Mountain Devil, "do ye know what that was?"

"Hill-bred," said the chief. "No. I lived in the Black Hills many years. Glad he died. Kill many warriors."

"It was a madman, then," said Bentley. "I thought so."

A few miles from the first fort the Indians left them. They reached the fort in safety. Here the old man and Jan bade them good-bye, but not until he had seen Bentley and Millicent married by the fort chaplain. The parting was painful, and the young bride was deeply affected. But it was over at last, and Millicent, hand in hand with her husband, watched their retiring forms as they passed over the prairie, toward the distant hills.

When Bentley Morris was older, and children were growing up about his knees, in the strong young State of which he was a leading man, he often told the tale of those perilous times, with Trapper Ben and Jan Schneider, in the camp in the Black Hills.

And once a year a letter, strange in orthography and composition, comes from the two trappers. Jan is still with Ben, and will be to the last.

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